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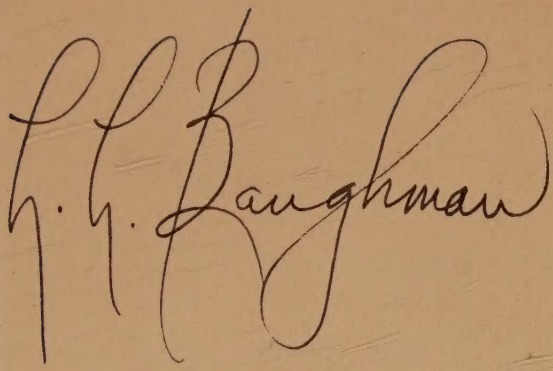

SERMONS ON OLD TESTAMENT CHARACTERS

Rev. CLOVIS G. CHAPPELL, D.D.

By Rev. C. G. Chappell, D.D.

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SERMONS ON OLD TESTAMENT CHARACTERS

BY

REV. CLOVIS G. CHAPPELL, D.D.

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SERMONS ON OLD TESTAMENT CHARACTERS
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PRINTED IN THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA

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SERMONS ON
OLD TESTAMENT CHARACTERS

SERMONS ON OLD TESTAMENT CHARACTERS

I

THE VOLUNTEER—ISAIAH

Isaiah 6:8

"Then said I, here am I; send me."

This "then" is a backward looking word. It looks away from the effect to the cause. It looks away from the stream to the fountain far among the hills. "Then," declares the prophet, "life for me took on a new departure. Then a moral revolution was wrought within my soul. Then I entered the service of the Lord Almighty. Then I became a volunteer in the army of the King of kings."

1

To what event does this "then" point?

Suppose I should say: "Then the skies were touched with rosy fingers of light. Then the hilltops grew golden with glory. Then the dewdrops upon the grasses glittered like a million jewels. Then the awakened birds burst into song. Then the working world went with light and leaden feet to its toil." When would you think that this wonderful transformation took

place? You could not help knowing that it took place when the day dawned. It took place when the radiant "morning came singing over the sea."

Again if I should say: "Then the winter-stripped trees put on their verdant foliage. Then the lawn grew beautiful with a carpet of green. Then the robin returned with its breast of sunshine and its song of joy. Then the violets lifted up their modest faces. Then the staid old apple tree decked itself more charmingly than a June bride. Then the south wind became as soft as the breath of an infant and as caressing as the hands of a mother. Then

'Every clod felt a stir of might,
An instinct within it that reaches and towers,
And groping blindly above it for light,
Climbed to a soul in the grasses and flowers.'"

Here again you could not but guess the event to which this "then" of my story is pointing. When did all this take place? It took place at the coming of springtime. No other cause could work such a gladsome transformation.

Now, this "then" on the lips of Isaiah points to an event that brought the dawning of a new day to him. It points to a vision that brought him out of winter into spiritual springtime. And what that event was is made very plain. Even if it were not, I am thinking that there would not be one of us that could not guess. "Isaiah, what was it that brought to you the dawning of a new day? How did you get out of dead winter into living spring?" This is his answer: "I saw the Lord." Isaiah's transformation was the result of a vision of the Lord Jesus Christ.

And, mark you, we cannot account for Isaiah apart

from this vision. We can no more do so than we can account for a similar transformation in a million other lives. There were many reasons against this gifted young man's ever becoming a prophet. One great hindrance was the fact that Isaiah was a man of high social position. He was at home in kings' palaces. And it was true then, as it is true still, that "not many mighty, not many noble are called." God longs for the rich and privileged just as much as He does for the poor and unprivileged. But how rare it is to find one of these willing to break from the golden fetters that bind him to become a free man in the service of God.

Isaiah was one of these few. He refused to allow either his wealth or his position to stand in the way of his volunteering for the service of the King. No doubt his conduct was a disappointment to many who hoped for great things for him in the political arena. No doubt his decision excited the ridicule and scorn of some who had not seen his vision and who had not come to share in his great dreams.

"Gilded galley slaves of mammon,
How my purse-proud brothers taunt me.
I might have been as well to do as they
Had I clutched like them my chances,
Learned their wisdom, crushed my fancies,
Starved my soul and gone to business every day."

II

How did Isaiah come to see this vision of Jesus Christ? (For John tells us that it was Jesus that Isaiah saw.)

Let it be understood at once that he did not come to this experience by mere accident, nor did he come to it

because he was a child of good fortune. Jesus Christ is ready to make himself just as real to you and to me as He did to Isaiah. We may see Him if we will, just as truly as did Isaiah in the long ago. All of us do not come to this vision by the same road. But the road is not the matter of supreme importance. The matter of supreme importance is the vision itself, the coming face to face with Jesus Christ.

How, then, did Isaiah come to this vision? We have the answer from his own lips: "In the year that King Uzziah died I saw also the Lord sitting upon a throne, high and lifted up, and His train filled the temple." This does not simply set a date, as others have pointed out. It rather tells the occasion of Isaiah's vision. Up to this time Isaiah had had his gaze fixed upon Uzziah. This king had been his hero and his hope. He was the greatest king that had held the throne since Solomon. He had been mightily helped, the record tells us, till he was strong.

Now, as often happens, the success of Uzziah went to his head. He became intoxicated with it. He became inflated with pride. One day, under the spell of his pride, he went into the Temple and stretched forth his hands to a holy task that God had reserved for others. He was smitten with leprosy. The fatal disease dragged him from the palace to the pest house. It wrenched the scepter from his hand. It tore the crown from his brow. It flung him out into the grave. And now the throne is vacant and Isaiah's heart is broken and his hope all but dead.

Under the burden of this great sorrow, Isaiah went into the Temple. Goaded on by the agony of his great need, he turned his eyes away from the throne that had

been left vacant by Uzziah to the throne of heaven that is forever occupied by the King Eternal. It was then that he saw the Lord, high and lifted up. Not that the Lord had just recently taken that position. The Lord had been there all the time waiting to reveal himself. But Isaiah had not looked His way. He had to have his heart broken before he could be induced to look.

Such has been the experience of many. It is possible for us to win our way into the presence of Jesus in the days of our health and worldly prosperity. There is absolutely no time when we may not find Him if we are only willing to seek for Him. But the trouble with us is that often we are so satisfied with the secondary, with the passing, with the things of a day that we do not seek Him. Too often we require a bit of heartbreak to make us turn our eyes to our ever present Saviour. Thus it was in the year that your baby died, in the year that you lost your wealth, in the year that your health was shattered, in the year that you turned from a new made grave,—it was then that you saw the Lord.

I know a woman whose face is beautifully radiant and out of whose eyes looks "the peace of a great discovery." Her influence pervades the community in which she lives like a rare and rich perfume. Friends seek her in joy and in sorrow, and "deeds of week-day holiness fall from her as noiselessly as the snow." But she has not always been like this. I knew her when as a Christian she was the weakest of the weak. How did the change come about? One day a great sorrow came. One day a compelling need put its heavy hands upon her two shoulders and crushed her to her knees. It was in this hour that she saw the Lord, high and lifted up.

"There, little girl, don't cry!
They have broken your doll, I know;
And your teaset blue and your playhouse too
Are things of the long ago.
But childish griefs will soon pass by,
There, there, little girl, don't cry!

There, little girl, don't cry!
They have broken your slate, I know;
And the glad, wild ways of your schoolhood days
Are things of the long ago.
But life and love will soon come by,
There, there, little girl, don't cry!

There, little girl, don't cry!
They have broken your heart, I know;
And the rainbow gleams of your youthful dreams
Are the things of the long ago.
But heaven holds all for which you sigh,
There, there, little girl, don't cry!"

III

What was the outcome of this vision?

1. It brought to Isaiah a sense of sin. "I saw the Lord," we hear him say. And what follows? "Then said I, woe is me! for I am undone; because I am a man of unclean lips, and I dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips: for mine eyes have seen the King, the Lord of hosts." A sense of God always brings a sense of sin. Job had profound faith in his own goodness. But all this vanished in the presence of God. "I have heard of Thee by the hearing of the ear. But now that mine eye seeth Thee, I abhor myself in dust and ashes." No man ever sees himself in the light of the divine countenance that he is not led to cry: "Unclean."

On the other hand, there is nothing more true than that where there is no sense of sin there is no sense of God. Here is a man going through a form of prayer. "God, I thank thee that I am not as other men. I fast twice in the week. I give tithes of all I possess." What is the secret of this self-congratulation? Is this Pharisee holy beyond his fellows? No. The reason that he is offering this pathetic travesty on prayer is that he has a good eye on himself and a bad eye on his brother, and no eye on God at all. He is as unconscious of God as a mole deeply burrowed in the earth is unconscious of the sun. We need no better proof that a man has no sense of God than just the fact that he has no sense of sin.

2. This vision led Isaiah to confess his sin. Not only did a sense of his awful uncleanness dawn upon him in the light of the divine countenance, but he was led to pour out his confession into the ear of Christ. He put his sin-soiled lips in the dust and confessed that he was unclean. He had absolutely no good word to say for himself. He did not tell the Lord how honest and upright and clean he had been in times past. He did not offer any excuses. He laid no claim to anything of moral worth. He sobbed out the confession of his spiritual bankruptcy: "I am a man of unclean lips and I dwell in the midst of a people with unclean lips."

3. The third result of this vision was cleansing. In presence of Christ, Isaiah saw his sin and confessed it. And what took place as he confessed? "Then flew one of the Seraphim unto me, having a live coal in his hand, which he had taken with the tongs from off the altar. And he laid it upon my mouth and said, Lo, this hath touched thy lips; and thine iniquity is taken away and thy sin purged." No sooner had this man

made his confession of uncleanness than there came to him cleansing at the hand of God. For it was true then, as it is true to-day, "if we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness."

4. The final result of this vision was that Isaiah found and accepted his task. To this man, conscious of the forgiving love of God, there came a call to service. "And I heard the voice of the Lord saying, Whom shall I send and who will go for us?" How this call came we do not know. It may have come through the still small voice of the Spirit speaking within his heart. It may have come through his consciousness of his peoples' need and of his conviction that he had discovered an adequate remedy for their need. But this at least we know: Isaiah was made certain that the God who had cleansed him was in need of him, was appealing to him for help.

To this appeal Isaiah did not turn a deaf ear. His heroic response comes to us to-night like a trumpet call to battle: "Then said I, here am I, send me." He made the matter personal. Without consulting flesh and blood he put himself unreservedly into the hands of his Lord. And how mightily did God use him. For more than fifty years he was the supreme spiritual voice of his nation. And even to-day he is God's spokesman to every one who has ears to hear.

To-night the scene is transferred from the far off temple in Jerusalem to this church in which we now worship. Times and outward conditions have greatly changed. But the same Christ is here and He is making the same appeal to us that He made to Isaiah. He is calling to His friends, calling through their love to Him, through their sense of gratitude, through the

needs of a shattered and broken world: "Whom shall I send, and who will go for us?" We must make Isaiah's manly response or the world cannot be saved.

Though Christ is calling to those who already know Him, He is calling no less urgently to those who are strangers to Him. Think not that you have to pass through an experience like this of Isaiah before He will accept you. "He receiveth sinners." He invites all men to enlist under His banner. Come to Him without knowing Him, and He will reveal Himself to you. Come to Him with all your sins and He will cleanse you and trust you and use you for His glory. His appeal is to every man. Therefore, it is every man's privilege to say: "Here am I, send me."

II

THE LURE OF THE WILDERNESS—JEREMIAH

Jeremiah 9:2

> "O that I had in the wilderness a lodging place of wayfaring men; that I might leave my people and go from them! for they be all adulterers, an assembly of treacherous men."

This longing to leave his people expressed by Jeremiah is altogether human. Jeremiah is not the only preacher that ever wanted to change his appointment. He is not the only worker that ever wanted to throw down his task and get away. Many of us have uttered this same cry. This is what the Psalmist was saying long ago: "Oh that I had wings like a dove, for then would I fly away and be at rest." There are some who begin to utter this longing in their very youth and it grows more intense as they get deeper into the years and life becomes more serious with its baptisms of tears —tears over losses and tears over bitter disappointments.

I

Why did Jeremiah wish to get away?

1. He wished to escape an unpleasant task. He loved the country. But the wilderness lured him at present because it offered him a refuge from the tempestuous life of the city. God had called Jeremiah to be a prophet. In response to that call he had entered

bravely upon his task. But he had not done so willingly. When Isaiah was called he responded with eagerness: "Here am I, send me." His work seems a joy. He meets his conflicts with a noble zest. But not so Jeremiah. He protests and shrinks and begs to be excused. "Ah, Lord God! behold I cannot speak, for I am a child."

But in spite of his shrinking and in spite of all protestations of his unfitness, the task is forced upon him. Therefore he is now in the limelight, though the glare of it offends him. He is in the midst of turmoil and conflict, though he is a lover of peace and quiet. He is forced to fight and contend, though the whole business is hateful to him. "Alas, my mother, that thou hast borne me a man of contention and strife to the whole world." He is traveling the prophet's road, but his feet bleed at every step that he takes. Therefore, it is only natural that he should want to leave his people and hie away to the wilderness.

Not only was the task of being a prophet distasteful to Jeremiah because of his peculiar temperament. His natural dislike was greatly increased on account of the kind of congregation to which he had to preach. His work brought him into daily contact with men whose association was entirely disagreeable. He was a clean, high-souled and sensitive idealist. Therefore, it was no little agony to be compelled to work constantly with men for whom he could find no more complimentary description than adulterers, traitors, slanderers, forsakers of God. It is not a matter of wonder, therefore, that he should want to leave such an uncongenial congregation and flee into the wilderness.

It has never been my lot to serve but one church that was thoroughly disagreeable. This congregation

was not so far gone as the congregation to which Jeremiah preached. But they were not altogether the type to win a pastor's heart. I recall with appreciation what my predecessor said to them in his farewell sermon. "This is," said he, "my last message. I wish to remark in closing that if everything is true about your former pastors that you have said about them, every one of them ought to be turned out of the Church. If everything is true of you that you have told me about one another, the last one of you ought to be hanged. We will receive the benediction." And he departed with some of the joy that I think Jeremiah would have felt could he have escaped to that longed for lodging place for wayfaring men.

Then Jeremiah's task was made the more difficult and distasteful to him because his ministry had to be almost altogether a ministry of denunciation and of doom. He would have been delighted to say the pleasing thing and the complimentary thing. He would have been most glad to be a preacher of hope and a prophet of optimism. But his unrepentant and sinful people made it impossible. He was far too sincere to cry "Peace! peace!" when he knew there was no peace. He saw far too clearly to be blind to the fact that punishment must inevitably follow sin. While others were declaring that God would save His people under any circumstances, he was forced to declare that unless they repented they should be driven into exile. "What else can I do?" he has God asking. He knows that no nation can be "saved materially unless it is redeemed spiritually."

2. Jeremiah wanted to get away from persecution.

The type of preaching that he was forced to do did not tend to make him popular. It did not win the applause and appreciation of his people. On the con-

trary, it made him exceedingly unpopular. It brought to him bitter opposition and persecution. At times that persecution took the form of cold neglect. When his sermon was over folks did not come forward and congratulate him and tell him how they enjoyed it, as you tell your pastor. They chilled him by their neglect and froze him by their lack of sympathy. There is the sob of a sensitive and deeply wounded heart in the cry: "I sat alone because of the wrath of God." He was weighed down by the burden of a great loneliness.

But there were other times when the persecution he suffered took another form. Sometimes he was ridiculed. He complains that he is made a laughing stock all the day. And what a heavy burden that is! There are few things harder to bear than to have folks laugh at you, scorn you, pass you by in contempt as a mere fanatic. When his book of prophecies was put into the hands of the king, this pathetic substitute for royalty showed no slightest appreciation. On the contrary, he made plain his contempt for the old prophet by taking his penknife and cutting the roll to pieces and burning it in the fire.

Then there were times when yet sterner forms of persecution were used. One day he was stoned out of his native village as if he were a wild street dog. At other times we find him suffering the pain and shame of the stocks. On another day his back was bared to the smiters and he had to undergo the agony and humiliation of being publicly whipped. He became thoroughly acquainted with the inside of prisons. One time he comes before us with hands and feet stained with stenchful mud, for he has been starving at the bottom of an old well. And though he was rescued, this was not wrought by any friend of his. It was not the work of any mem-

ber of his congregation. It was the work of a negro slave who was too humane to see the old man die by the inch. Therefore, we are not going to blame him if again and again he wished to leave his people and flee into the wilderness.

3. He wanted to leave because his ministry seemed an utter failure.

No man, I think, ever preached with more passionate earnestness than did Jeremiah. He warned men night and day with tears. But his warnings were unheeded. His report was not believed. No man ever had a more fruitless ministry in his own day than did this prophet. It is hard enough to keep climbing when you are approaching nearer and nearer the summit. It is hard enough to keep fighting when victory is coming closer and closer. But to keep climbing when the summit seems to retreat from you and to keep fighting when victory becomes more and more remote, that is difficult indeed.

And remember that the pain of Jeremiah's failure was not the result of the sense of his own inability to win. The agony that he suffered over it was not born of the humiliation that it brought to him. His failure was inseparably connected with the failure of his people. His inability to reach them and to win them to repentance meant, so far as his own day was concerned, that his ministry had gone for nothing. But what was far harder to bear, it meant the loss and utter ruin of the people he loved. To stay by, therefore, meant not only the pain of toiling at a fruitless task, but the yet greater pain of watching the approaching death of the nation that he loved better than he loved his own life. His yearning to be permitted to leave has in it something of the shrinking agony of heartbroken Hagar as

she cries: "Let me not witness the death of my child!" He wanted to get away from a ministry whose failure meant not only his personal inability to win, but the yet more bitter heartache of watching his nation die.

II

Did Jeremiah leave?

No, he did not. He was eager to go, yet he stayed. He yearned to run, yet he remained steadfast. He felt the lure of the wilderness and yet he remained amidst the turmoil and toil of the city. And this he did not because of any physical compulsion. He might have gone time and again, and his own people would have been glad to have him go. But in spite of the hatred of his people and his own shrinking from his task, he stood in his place and remained true for more than forty long, weary years.

III

Why did Jeremiah stay?

1. He remained steadfast from a sense of duty. The same bonds held him that held Paul. "Behold, I go bound in spirit unto Jerusalem not knowing the things that shall befall me there save that the Holy Ghost witnesseth in every city saying that bonds and afflictions abide me." He stayed at his post because he felt that he ought to stay. When he uttered this cry, he knew that leaving for him was an impossibility. "Oh that I might leave." But what is implied is "I cannot. I must stay."

"I must." That is a word that is frequently found in the vocabulary of moral giants. "Oh, that I might

go," he said, "but I must stay. This I must do simply because it is my duty." Now there may not be so much of gush and of glow in a declaration of this kind as we would like. But surely you will agree that such a sense of duty is sorely needed to-day. Entirely too many of us let ourselves off with the doing of the easy or the pleasant. We listen for the voice of a shallow emotionalism. And failing to hear it, we give heed to the voice of laziness and indifference. We face the work we ought to do asking too often how we feel and too seldom what is our duty. Jeremiah listened to the voice of duty. Hence he did the thing he ought to do whether he felt like it or not.

2. Jeremiah was bound to his post by the cords of a mighty conviction. He was absolutely sure of the truth of the message that God had given him to deliver. The fact that men refused to give heed did not in any sense lead him to doubt the truth of his message. There were times when it made it hard for him to preach. There were times when he even resolved to keep utter silence. But this resolution was soon shattered because the Word of God was as a burning fire shut up in his bones. Silence became unendurable. Under the pressure of an irresistible conviction he felt himself compelled to speak. He was convinced, in spite of the fact that his message was being rejected, that its acceptance was his people's only hope.

There were many other prophets at that time, but their messages differed widely from the message of Jeremiah. They were prophets of an easy and sentimental optimism. They came with the popular cry of "Peace! peace!" upon their lips. But Jeremiah saw a different vision. He was as sure of God's love as the other prophets, but he did not forget the fact that as

intensely as God loved His people, just so intensely did He hate their sin. He said with terrible clearness that if they did not repent, if they did not turn from their idolatry and adultery, God would be compelled to fling them out of His sight regardless of His love. He was gripped by the conviction that there was no safety for the individual nor for the nation without righteousness. Therefore, it is not to be wondered at that he remained to shriek his message into the ears of his people when he saw them hugging to themselves the damning delusion that God would save them even in their rebellion and in their mad clinging to their iniquities. This conviction that he had a message that offered his nation its one hope of salvation caused him to stand by his post when he fain would have fled to the restful and easeful life of the wilderness.

That same conviction should steady us. Is it a fact that we have all sinned and come short of the glory of God? Is it a fact that there is no other name under heaven given among men whereby we must be saved? Is it a fact that He is able to save unto the uttermost them that come unto God by Him? Do you know these facts? Do you accept them as facts? Then you must preach them. It is not a question of whether men applaud or hiss you. It is not a question of whether they throw mud at you or throw bouquets at you. We must speak the truth as God gives us to see it. To refuse is to spit in the face of conviction and throw away your crown.

3. Then Jeremiah was held to his task by the cords of love.

These Jews had in them much that pained and grieved and disgusted and even angered this prophet. But in spite of all their sins he loved them still. They

were still his people. And though they fill him with indignation and though he declares he is full of the fury of the Lord against them, yet his heart is in their keeping and he cannot for the life of him turn away from them. Often his words scorch and blister and burn. Often his cheeks are flushed and his eyes are fiery with anger. Yet his heart is always full of love.

And do not think it strange that this prophet can be intensely angry and intensely loving at the same time. Love and anger are not in the least inconsistent. In fact, his anger was born of his love. If he had not loved he would not have raged. If he had not loved he would have gone complacently to the wilderness in perfect and broadminded good humor. That is the secret of much that passes for tolerance to-day. It is merely utter indifference parading in the borrowed garments of tolerance.

Personally, I believe that it would be a distinct gain if some of us had more capacity for anger. Now I do not mean that particular type of anger that is the result of selfishness; that anger that you felt when you were not the principal speaker or did not get invited to the party. I mean the anger that comes to a morally sound man when right is trodden under the foot of might, when justice is made the victim of injustice. Jeremiah had a great capacity for anger. His words are hot and burning words to this day. No man ever rebuked more unsparingly, and the secret of it is that no man ever loved more tenderly. Therefore, though he shrieks at his congregation in white-heat anger, he stays with them until the very last because he is in the grip of a love that will not let him go.

4. Then Jeremiah remained at his post through the power of God.

From what the Lord said to Jeremiah, it is evident that he was not by nature a staunch and courageous man. He was sensitive and timid and retiring. But God promised him in the very beginning that He would stand close for help. "Thou, therefore, gird up thy loins, and arise, and speak unto them all that I command thee. Be not dismayed at their faces. . . . For, behold, I have made thee this day a defensed city, and an iron pillar, and brazen walls against the whole land. . . . And they shall fight against thee; but they shall not prevail against thee, for I am with thee, saith the Lord, to deliver thee."

There is absolutely no accounting for the steadfastness of Jeremiah apart from this promise. As He in later years changed fluctuating Simon, the son of Jona, into a rock of Christlike character, so He turned Jeremiah into the opposite of what he was. This He did not independent of the prophet. He was able to do so because Jeremiah was a man constant and earnest in prayer. He opened the windows of his soul toward God and the Spirit of the Almighty came in and made him strong. In all the Scriptures I know of no finer example of the power of God to equip a man for the performance of a task that in the energy of the flesh was absolutely impossible. Surely this man learned long before St. Paul of the sufficiency of the grace of God.

IV

What was the outcome?

So far as his own generation was concerned, Jeremiah lived and died almost an utter failure. When his nation was in ruins, the last handful of Jews that were

left consulted him as to whether they should stay in their own land or flee into Egypt. He took the matter before the Lord and obtained an answer. He told them upon divine authority to remain in their own land. But in spite of his warning they fled into Egypt and carried the protesting and broken-hearted prophet with them. In Egypt he spent his last tearful days. Here he went on denouncing the sin of his wayward people. Here he died, and here his ashes rest in a nameless grave. And his ministry continued a failure to the very end. Not one bit even of "sunset success" was granted to him.

But if he failed to be heard in his own generation, he has been heard by the subsequent centuries. His influence upon his own people has possibly been greater than that of any other of the prophets. But his influence has by no means been confined to his own nation. He has put his passionate hands upon all the continents. We feel the uplift of his Spirit-filled personality as we meet in God's house to-day. And I dare to believe that as this redeemed saint looks back upon life from the midst of that innumerable company that have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb, he sees of the travail of his soul and is satisfied.

of our village a gentleman rose to his feet after hearing a joke and went away laughing. A keen old physician looked after him and said: "If that man knew how near dead he is he would not be laughing in that fashion. He is suffering from a fatal disease. I can tell by the way he walks." Now the danger was not in the walk, but in what the walk revealed. So the sin of this woman was not so much in her backward look as in what her backward look indicated.

III

What did this backward look indicate?

It indicated a divided heart. It indicated an undecided will. The reason the Mayor's wife looked back was because she was still in love with Sodom even though her steps were turned away from it. She was little in love with the heights even though she was making her way in their direction. Life was calling to her from the hills. Also the voices of Sodom were calling from the lowlands. She was attentive in a measure to both voices. She felt the lure of both. She felt especially the lure of Sodom. Hence, with a divided mind, an undecided will, she looked back.

IV

What did this divided heart do for her?

1. It robbed her of her joy. Since death and disaster are so soon to be homing in the streets of Sodom, you would have thought that she would have gone out with great gladness. You would have expected that she would have hurried out with nimble feet, with a song on her lips and with deep joy in her heart be-

cause of her great deliverance. But what she was leaving more than counteracted the joy in what she was attaining. Being divided in her allegiance there was an utter want of joy in her heart. Fingering the mud with one hand and reaching for the stars with the other, she found nothing but wretchedness.

Divided hearts are always unhappy. No half-hearted Christian is ever a joyous Christian. How many people we meet who have no gladness in their religion! How many find the pilgrim's road a dull and drab and joyless road! How many find the yoke of the Lord anything but easy! And what is the secret? This: a divided heart. They have never been able to turn loose the willows that overhang the bank and be swept out into the wide sea of God's love. They have never been willing to turn loose every sin and lay hold with their might upon Jesus Christ. Hence to the joy that might be theirs they remain utter strangers.

Did you ever stand upon the seashore and witness its restlessness? How constantly its billows are heaving! How ceaselessly it flings itself against its restraining shores! What is the matter with the sea? Why does it not lie down and be at peace? It is a victim of the divided mind. The voices of cloudland are calling to it. It is being played upon by the magnetism of the heights. But when it is half a mind to respond to the call of the higher voices, the muddy old world puts its arms round it and whispers, "Stay with me." And it never quite decides to give up the world, nor is it ever quite able to stop its ears to the voices that call from the heights. Thus it is always tossing, thus it is forever a stranger to rest and peace.

2. The fact that the Mayor's wife had a divided

heart retarded her progress. The story says, "She looked back from behind." It does not take one who is undecided long to fall behind. Do you remember Elijah's question on Mt. Carmel? "How long halt ye between two opinions?" An undecided man is a crippled man. Indecision squanders our powers. It cripples us. And a man thus crippled cannot possibly keep pace with him who is not so afflicted. It is the man of decision, the man whose heart is united that makes progress, and only he.

When I was a boy my brother and I were one day passing through the fields together. We came to a little rivulet that on account of the spring rains had become a stream some twelve feet wide. We decided, however, that we had to cross this stream. And there was no way to cross it but to jump it. This we knew we could do if we set ourselves earnestly to it. I was to jump first. I went back from the stream to give myself a good running start and bent to the task. But just an instant before I was to make my spring my brother changed his mind and shouted, "Stop! stop! stop!" I half jumped and half did not jump. I became the victim of a divided mind. The result was that I landed right in the middle of the stream.

It is the decided man that wins and only he. A drop of water is a very weak and harmless thing. It falls from the heights so gently that it would hardly hurt a baby were it to hit him in the eye. But when I was in the Panama Canal Zone some years ago I saw them removing a mountain with nothing but some drops of water. These drops, however, instead of being scattered were centralized. They were saying, "This one thing I do." And when these raindrops, thus united, turned upon the mountain it took to its heels.

3. This indecision wrought her doom. As she went joylessly and half-heartedly toward the heights her steps became more and more slow. At last she stopped and looked longingly back to the city. The voice of her baser self said, "Go back." The voice of her better self said, "Go on." Inclination said, "Go back." Conscience said, "Climb to the heights." And there she hesitated till the smothering lava threw its arms round her and she became her own tomb. And when the smoke was lifted, she stood a crude piece of statuary. But the face of the statue was turned not toward the heights, but toward the ruined city of the plain.

Now you will misunderstand the story altogether if you think that the doom of the Mayor's wife consisted in the fact that she became a pillar of salt by the way. Her doom was not physical but spiritual. Her physical death was a mere incident. The tragedy of that backward looking bit of salt consists in the fact that it tells a story of a backward looking soul. The physical disaster that overwhelmed her did not make her turn back. It only preserved for us her photograph. It only took the picture for us of a human soul that, though wooed by the heights, could never get her consent to break from the sin and wickedness of the lowlands.

For instance. There were two figures found in Pompeii when it was unearthed years ago. One of them was a Roman sentinel. He was standing erect in his place at the gate of the city. His spear was in his ashen hand, his sword was at his side. His helmet was upon his head. There the ashes had embalmed him and kept him through the long years. Now this disaster that overtook the city of Pompeii did not put this Roman soldier at the place of duty and keep him there faithful and true. It only photographed him for us.

It only found him in the attitude of faithfulness and preserved him as it found him.

And there was another body found. It was that of a woman. Her feet were turned toward the city gate. Evidently she was fleeing with her might from the heavy doom that was overwhelming the city. But though her feet were toward the gate, her body was turned backward. Her hands were outstretched toward the ground. And just beyond her finger tips was a bag of pearls. Possibly she had dropped them. Possibly they had been dropped by another and she had seen them in passing. Anyway she could not shake off their spell and she turned to pick them up, and the lava came down and embalmed her. But this disaster did not place her in that attitude of grasping greed. It only photographed her so that the future generations might see. Thus death did for Lot's wife. It did not turn her face backward to the world. It only photographed that face for our beholding.

This, then, is the message from those dumb lips. (1) A divided heart is a wretched heart. To find joy in Christ you must be out and out for Christ. (2) A divided heart makes no real progress toward the heights. To be a useful and growing Christian you must be a whole-hearted Christian. (3) A divided heart in the end means death, moral death. If you require proof, "Remember Lot's wife." Therefore, I summon you to a thoroughgoing decision—"Choose ye this day whom ye will serve." In that direction is victory. In all others—defeat and failure.

V

A WOMAN'S WRONGS—HAGAR

Genesis 21: 17

"What aileth thee, Hagar?"

The scene of this story is a desert. As far as the eye can see the weird waste stretches. Above it the heat specters dance, and here and there the scorching sands drift in whirling eddies as the winds play with them. From out a hot and copper sky the sun shoots its arrows of fire. And there is not a tree in sight with an offer of friendly shade. The only visible protection is a few dwarfed and scraggy bushes whose shelter is little more than a meager mockery. In this pitiless furnace silence reigns—a silence deep and profound.

Suddenly that silence is broken. There is a low moan followed by the abandoned sobbing of a woman. She is weeping as only those weep whose hearts are broken. As we hurry forward, we find a lad lying under one of the scraggy bushes. His lips are cracked. His tongue is swollen. His eyes are bloodshot. He is weakly calling for water. Over there a bow-shot away sits a woman, his mother. Her back is turned upon her boy. She has not the heart to see him die. At her feet is a water bottle as dry as the sands of the desert. The only moisture in all the wide waste is the hot tears that flow down her swarthy cheeks.

Why is she sitting here? She is not waiting for help.

She is waiting for death. She has lost her way. Weary hour upon weary hour she has tramped in the trackless desert to no avail. Her water supply has given out. Her strength has failed. Her hope has died. And now, utterly spent, she sits upon the hot sands heedless of the fiery rays of the sun and gives herself to an abandon of grief as she waits for ghastly death.

Now it was to this woman, lost and hopeless and dying, that God spoke. It was this woman, sinful, but more sinned against than sinning, that was startled by a question from the Lord Almighty. He broke in upon her sobs to ask this question: "What aileth thee, Hagar?" This greatly wronged woman thought herself absolutely alone. She thought herself utterly abandoned and forgotten. But suddenly she finds herself companioned by One of whom she knows but little. She finds herself questioned by One at whose hands she had expected no consideration.

I

What is implied by this question? On the surface it seems a rather strange question for God to ask. It sounds as if there were no great heart in it. It seems a bit like mockery to ask such a question. "What aileth thee, Hagar?" The question might have been asked in such a tone as to fill the woman with rage. But be assured it was not so asked by our Lord. It was a question fragrant with budding hopes.

1. This question brought to Hagar the realization that God had not lost her. He knew where she was. She had lost herself. She had wandered here and there over those hot and trackless wastes till she had no idea where she was. She hardly knew east from west. She

did not know the way to any springs. She did not know the path back to Abraham's tents. She did not know any road that offered the least promise of help or safety. She was hopelessly lost.

Now it was to this poor, bewildered woman that God spoke. And His question indicated at least this: that He was watching over her. She had traveled far, but she had not traveled beyond His knowledge nor beyond His presence. Neither have you. You have not dodged Him. "Whither shall I go from Thy presence, or whither shall I flee from Thy spirit? If I ascend into heaven, Thou art there. If I make my bed in hell, behold, Thou art there. If I take the wings of the morning and dwell in the uttermost parts of the sea, there shall Thy hand lead me and Thy right hand shall hold me." Hagar had lost herself, but God had not lost Hagar.

2. This question not only implies that God knew where Hagar was, but that He knew her sorrows. He knew her wrongs. He knew that she was suffering and why she was suffering. "What aileth thee, Hagar?" That was God's way of saying: "My child, there is something wrong with you. You have more heartache than you know what to do with. You have a heavier burden than you are able to bear. You have a wound that is beyond your power to heal. You have a sickness for which you know no cure. There is something wrong. This you know and this I know."

3. Then this question implies that God wants her to tell Him her story. He was eager for this woman, smarting and burning under the lash of her wrongs, to tell Him all about it. He wanted her to tell Him all the sore vexations of her heart. He was yearning for her to take Him into her confidence and tell Him all

that was vexing her, all that was tormenting her, all that was making for the wrecking and marring of her hopes and her dreams.

And He is the same God to-day. How eager was Jesus to listen to the stories of needy souls that came to Him when He walked among men. When that timid woman slipped up in the crowd and touched His garments and was healed, He did not allow her to go away. He turned about and said:—"Who touched me?" He could not be satisfied till this woman came and fell down before Him and told Him all the truth.

"What aileth thee?" Have you a secret wound that you dare not reveal to any human eye? Have you a heart-breaking story that you cannot tell to your husband or to your wife or to your dearest earthly friend? Then tell it to Jesus. He will be infinitely interested. He will be infinitely patient and understanding. When nobody else can understand you, He can. When nobody else will listen to you with patience and with appreciation, He will. Bow your head and heart and tell Him.

"I must tell Jesus all of my troubles,
I cannot bear my burdens alone.
I must tell Jesus and He will help me,
Jesus can help me, Jesus alone."

4. Finally, this question implied that if Hagar would only tell her story, God was willing and able to help her. He is not asking you to make bare your wounds for nothing. He is not asking you to show Him all your heart out of morbid curiosity. His question means that if you will only come and tell Him, He will be willing to help. And not only is He willing, but He

is also able. There is no need that He cannot meet. There is no bondage from which He cannot set us free. "He is able to save unto the uttermost them that come unto God by Him."

Many a burdened heart has come to me that I would gladly have helped, but I could not. Many a wound have I seen that I would willingly have healed, but it was beyond my power. But there is nothing too hard for God. There are no knots that He cannot untangle. There are no tears that He cannot dry. There are no burdens that He cannot help you to carry. There are no stains that He cannot wash away. However dark may be some of the pages that you have written into your life's story, remember this: "The blood of Jesus Christ, His Son, cleanseth us from all sin." Come to Him and tell Him about it. Come with the assurance that He will listen to you, and, having listened, He will heal your hurts and bid you go in peace.

II

What response did Hagar make to this question? Her answer is not printed. One has suggested that the reason it is not given is because it would not bear the printing. If ever a woman had a story to tell, this woman had. The words that fell from her lips must have been hotter than the sands of the desert. I fancy I can hear her across the far spaces of the years as she pours out the burning torrent. Her hands are clenched, her eyes flash like the fiery rays of the sun, and her swarthy cheeks burn as she spits out the story of her wrong.

"A few years ago," she begins, as she fights back her sobs, "I became a servant in the family of Abraham.

Not long had I been there before I discovered that it was a peculiar family. They were not worshipers of the gods of my fathers. They spurned to bow before Isis and Osiris, the gods of Egypt. They claimed that their God was the one God. They claimed that He had kindled the sun and had lighted the distant stars. They claimed that He had 'dipped His hand into the chalice of eternity and made the oceans to drip and the rivers to flow.' And, little by little, I came to share their faith.

"Later I discovered that the husband and wife had one great dream; that they were upheld by one overmastering hope. That hope was the expectation of an heir. Their God had promised them a son, and this son was to be the inheritor of all the promises that God had made to Abraham. He was to be no ordinary man. In him, they declared, all the nations of the earth were to be blessed.

"But year after year went by, and the child that was hoped for and prayed for and expected did not come. At last faith burned low. Then one day the husband and wife talked together. It was Sarah's own suggestion. She said:—'God is not going to make good His promise to me. You had better turn elsewhere for the fulfillment of your hopes, else we will die in the wilderness and our family will utterly perish. I will give to you to wife my maid, Hagar.'

"Was I to blame? Was I not a slave? Was it not my duty to do the bidding of my master? So when I held my own laddie to my heart I felt no shame. I felt only an abounding pride. I looked the lovelight into his eyes with wildest joy. I dreamed of the day when my boy should inherit the promises that God had given to the heir of Abraham. And the days were

bright with a hope that I thought nothing could destroy.

"But one awful day God made good the promise that He had made to Abraham. The angel of suffering came to Sarah's tent and Isaac was born. From that hour I knew that my hopes were to be disappointed. From that hour I knew that my boy was destined to be robbed of his rights. I knew that both he and Isaac could not be heirs to their father. I was sure that a final break between the household of Abraham and myself was inevitable.

"Only two days ago that break came. Sarah demanded that I be cast out. She would not delay a moment longer. She would not brook my presence even in the slaves' quarters. I was to be bundled off at once. So with a handful of food and a bottle of water I was turned out into the wilderness. I was driven forth into this desert and left to die. And here I am, the victim of another's sin. Here I am, weary and spent, robbed of my hopes, robbed of my dreams, robbed of my life, robbed of my boy."

It is a story of tragic wrong. There is no shutting our eyes to that. God did not shut His eyes to that fact. And to add to the bitterness of Hagar's heart, I can hear her fairly shriek her accusation:—"And Abraham was a pious man. He was a member of the Church. He was a friend of God." And because this is true, Hagar is in danger not only of hating Abraham and his wife, who have done her a great wrong, but she is also in danger of hating Abraham's God, who has done her no wrong. To hate anybody is an awful calamity. To hate God is the supreme calamity.

III

What answer did God make to this pathetic story? He did not urge Hagar stubbornly to nurse her grief and keep alive her hate. He did not tell her to live for the one purpose of getting even with the man who had wronged her. The roadway of anger and of bitter rebellion never leads out of the desert. It only leads deeper into its horrid depths. Nursing your wrongs and your burning hate is never the path to an oasis. Hagar must leave God to deal with Abraham, as you must leave God to deal with the one who has wronged you.

"Fear not," God whispers to this tormented and harassed and broken woman. "You are not doomed and forgotten. Your lad is not to be destroyed and thrown away. I have heard the voice of the lad where he is. His pitiful cries for water have broken your heart. But remember, my heart is more tender than yours. If you have grieved, greater has been my grief. If you have suffered, greater has been my suffering. Fear not, therefore, for I am here to meet your needs."

Then the story tells us that the Lord opened Hagar's eyes so that she saw a fountain springing up in the desert. Why had Hagar not discovered that fountain before? It was not because the fountain was not there. It had been there all the while. When she was draining the last drop of water into the parched lips of her son, this fountain was hard by holding out its cup of refreshment. While she was drawing every breath in agony, it was offering its comfort. While she was fisticuffing with ghastly death, it was prattling hard by of life. The fountain was right at hand all the while.

And, heart, the Lord does not have to make special

provisions for your salvation. He has already made it. The fountain has already been opened for sin and uncleanness. Complete provision has already been made for your needs. When Jesus said on the Cross, "It is finished," He meant that a full and perfect and adequate salvation had been provided for all the needs of all the world. Your help, like that of Hagar, is at hand. For the Christ of the Cross is at hand.

Why had not Hagar seen the fountain before? It may be that her eyes were too blinded by her tears. It may be that they were made dim by hopelessness and black despair. It may be, as another has pointed out, that she was too busy contemplating her wrongs, looking at her terrible injuries and irreparable losses. Many have missed the fountain so. To fix our gaze on our sins, our failures, our difficulties, is the way of despair. We must look away from these to Him. "Look unto me and be ye saved all ye ends of the earth."

And what do you suppose Hagar did when she saw the fountain? I imagine she ceased to sob over her wrongs. She ceased to wait for a tormenting death. She stooped down and kissed the spring on the lips and found refreshment. She filled her empty water bottle and brought refreshment and salvation to her child. Then and there she claimed the provision that God had made for her. She made haste in the fear that a moment's delay might mean the loss of her boy.

Will you be thus wise? Are you thirsty? Are you hungry of heart? There is One here who claims to be the Bread of Life. There is One, far closer to you than the preacher, who is saying, "If any man thirst, let him come to me and drink. He that believeth on me, out of his inner life shall flow rivers of living water." God is able to supply all your needs. He is able to

supply them so abundantly that out of your inner life shall flow streams of refreshing for others, for those who love you and for those who call you friend. "Ho, every one that thirsteth, come ye to the waters."

VI

A THRILLING DISCOVERY—JACOB

Genesis 28: 17

"This is the gate of heaven."

I

What a fascinating discovery! How rich in joyous thrills! How full of gladsome comfort! How like the sheltering arms of a mother to a tired and frightened child! How like the welcoming lights of home to a fear-dogged traveler who has lost his way in the dark! Think of it! Here is a man who fancies himself utterly alone, when suddenly he finds that he is companioned by angels. Here is one who, lying down amidst the silence of the wilds, suddenly hears that silence broken by his Father's voice. Here is one who, believing himself far from home, wakes all at once to the realization that he has his hand on the latchstring of the house of many mansions. No wonder he exclaims with mingled awe and gladness:—"This is the gate of heaven."

II

Who made this discovery?

The answer to this question is at once surprising and encouraging. It is surprising because you would naturally expect that one who was able to win his way past the things of time and sense till he came to find the

gate of heaven must have been a very holy man. You would naturally expect that one who, while his feet were yet upon "this dusty spot that men call earth," got hold on the door knob of the heavenly home, must have been a man whose hands were altogether clean and whose heart had hardly been soiled by a single sin.

On the contrary, the man who made this discovery was in no sense a saint. He was not even a decently honest man. He was a trickster, a cheat, a shrewd supplanter. When we first meet him he is far less lovable than his brother, Esau. Yet Esau is little more than a fine animal. One might perchance suppose that Jacob had come to this lonely spot where he lays him down to sleep bent upon some high and holy quest. But such is not the case. He is not a seeker after God. He is here because his crimes have made it impossible for him to remain at home. He is a fugitive from justice. Yet, strange to say, this man who cannot stay in the tents of his father because he is too much of a crook, is the man who discovers the gate of heaven.

If this is surprising, it is also encouraging. It is encouraging for the simple reason that if heaven's gate is to be discovered only by those who have never sinned, then there would be no hope for such people as Jacob and ourselves. For if there is one thing that we all must know about ourselves, it is this:—"We have all sinned and come short of the glory of God." As we meet together we cannot but be conscious of many a failure and many a shortcoming, and many a positive sin. Therefore, if sinlessness were the requirement for this discovery, we should be without hope. But since a trickster like Jacob can win his way to the gate, then there is hope for us, regardless of the stains of yesterday and regardless of the sins of to-day. I have, therefore,

this good news: every one of us may come to say with the solid conviction of Jacob: "This is the gate of heaven."

III

How did Jacob come to make this discovery?

Let us face the fact at once that he did not make it by mere accident. He did not happen upon this gate as you might chance to find a piece of coin that some one had dropped or a treasure that some one had lost. We may make cheap and half worthless discoveries by mere good fortune. But we do not discover the things of supreme value in that way. When the woman with the issue of blood touched Jesus, it was no accidental touch. She was not a thronger. The healing that came to her was not a gift of good fortune. It was a gift of Christ in response to her faith.

Neither did Jacob make this discovery because he was the peculiar favorite of heaven. God does not distribute His gifts on the basis of favoritism. It is hard for us to realize this, though it is one of the commonplaces of His Word. James and John had not learned this or they would never have come to Jesus with such a request as, "Grant that we may sit the one on Thy right hand and the other upon Thy left in Thy Kingdom."

But what said Jesus? "To sit upon my right hand and upon my left is not mine to give, but it is for him for whom it is prepared of my Father." That is, the first place in the Kingdom of Heaven does not depend upon God's favoritism. It depends upon the capacity of the receiver. Suppose some gifted singer were singing in our city. I might go to him and say: "Grant that I may get more out of your concert than any other

man." What would he have to answer? "Such privilege is not mine to give. The man will get the largest pleasure out of my singing who has the largest capacity for enjoying music. If you have no ear for music, you will get no joy at all, however eager I might be to please you. Your enjoying depends not solely upon me. It depends also upon yourself."

Suppose I were to go to the custodian of a great art gallery and say to him:—"I want you to see to it that I get more pleasure and inspiration out of the pictures in your keeping than any other man. He would have to answer that my request was beyond his power. He could open the door and let me into the gallery. He could permit me to see those canvases where the great masters have spilled their dreams. But capacity to enjoy, to appreciate, to appropriate would depend not upon him, but it would depend upon myself.

And of this I am increasingly confident. God is giving us every revelation of Himself that we will permit Him to give. He is bestowing upon us every single favor that we are willing to receive. He is granting us every bit of power that we are willing to use. He is giving us all the spiritual wealth that He can induce us to appropriate. The longing of His heart is to enrich us with the infinite wealth at His disposal. He is willing to give us of the very best. "For the eyes of the Lord run to and fro throughout the whole earth to shew Himself strong in the behalf of him whose heart is perfect toward Him." He is eager to bring us to this wonderful discovery made by Jacob. Therefore, if we fail, the fault is not His, but our own.

How, then, did Jacob come to make this discovery?

1. He came to it through a sense of his own need. Jacob was not an altogether young man at this time.

But he is away from home for the first time. He feels horribly alone. Homesickness comes upon him like an avalanche. The very silence of the night terrifies him. The stars in the sky seem to mock him. They are so far away. But they do not seem more distant than all he has loved in other days. They do not seem more distant than the God in whom he has dimly and imperfectly believed. To-night in these wild solitudes he is very wretched and very sick of soul, and his heart, if not his lips, is crying out for help.

2. Then Jacob cannot shut his eyes to the fact that the heartbreaking loneliness and homesickness of this hour are the result of his own wrong-doing. When he first began his journey the sunshine was doubtless bright about him. It is possible that he blamed Esau then. It is possible that he blamed almost everybody but himself. But it is different now. The thought comes home to him with sickening conviction. The fact that he is a fugitive, alone, separated from loved ones and separated from God is the result, not of the wrong doing of another, but of himself. And I have an idea that deep down in his soul he whispered the confession of a later penitent:—"Against Thee, Thee only have I sinned and done this evil in Thy sight."

Now it was this loneliness and this repentance that made it possible for God to reveal Himself to him. They made it possible for God to make real to him the eternal and the unseen. When he had come to the end of himself, when he had got to the place where his soul was thirsting for God, when his sense of sin had made him sorrowful and ashamed, then it was that God spoke to him and enabled him to say, "This is the gate of heaven."

And it is to such that God is able to grant this thrill-

ing discovery still. If you have no need, you will never make it. But if there is a need, if you are thirsting for God; if your losses, your broken hopes, your broken vows, drive you to bow at His feet, then this discovery is ahead of you. We do not all come to it by the same road. Sometimes we find it at the door of disappointment. Sometimes the sick room becomes transformed by the grace of God into the gate of heaven. Even sometimes the door behind which a loved one lies dead leads us to the discovery of the gateway to the Father's house.

IV

Now what is implied by this discovery?

1. To be able to say, "This is the gate of heaven," means that the spiritual and the unseen have become genuine realities to you. It means that God has been realized. It means that Christ is no longer a far-off figure of history, whose face is becoming dimmer with the passing of the years, but a reality to you in the here and now.

"But warm, sweet, tender even yet,
A present help is He;
And faith has still its Olivet,
And love its Galilee.

The healing of His seamless dress
Is by our beds of pain;
We touch Him in life's throng and press,
And we are whole again."

2. To be able to say, "This is the gate of heaven," means not only that we have a real sense of our unseen

Lord; it means also that heaven itself is a reality. We are absolutely sure of the life to come. We are certain that Jesus is not deceiving us when He tells us that He is preparing a place for us. We sing with new and glad conviction:—

> "There is a land of pure delight
> Where saints immortal reign,
> Infinite day excludes the night,
> And pleasures banish pain."

We are certain that there is a home of the soul; that there is a place where love shall find its own. We become as sure of the home unseen as we are of the home in which we dwell.

3. Not only do we become certain of the reality of heaven, but we become sure of its nearness. Jacob had been feeling horribly alone. He had felt that heaven was far away. That conviction was born of his sense of sin. That same conviction has somehow found its way even into the songs of the Church. "There is a happy land, far, far away." I wonder how the poet found that out. There is no hint of it in the Bible. The Bible always represents the spirit world as very near. No wonder that our hearts fail us if we are convinced that heaven, with all that it means, is far away, while our heartaches and our sins and our tears are so near. But what we may learn is that heaven is so close that we may say, "This is the gate of heaven."

4. This discovery not only brings the realization of the nearness of heaven, but also the possibility of communion between heaven and ourselves. If heaven has a gate, it is for the purpose of communion between God and ourselves. The gate is open for the incoming of

our prayers. It is open for the outcoming of His help. It is open also at the end of the journey for the incoming of ourselves. It is open to admit you and me. If we fail to enter, it will not be because the gate is fast shut in our faces, it will be because we refuse our privileges. It is open to every man, woman and child who is willing to enter.

It should not be hard for us to believe this. Do you remember Lochlin Campbell in "Beside the Bonnie Briar Bush?" A thorough-going Pharisee he was. But his daughter went away from home and broke his heart. And the father suffered and grieved. Goaded by his rugged Puritan conscience, he struck her name from the Bible. But he could not strike her name from his heart. And one night she came back home. As she fell against the door it flew open. And she found herself in her father's loving arms. Heaven's door is open to you. If you will only dare to come to Him, you will make that discovery for yourself.

V

What was the effect of this discovery on Jacob's afterlife?

Let us say frankly he did not prove altogether true to his vision. There remained much in him that was of the earth earthy. It was not till some twenty years later that Jacob became a real prince. But, while this experience did not work a complete transformation, it did something for him.

1. This experience led Jacob to a vow of consecration. After this he declared that the Lord should be his God. And that vow carried with it not only the purpose on the part of Jacob to accept the Lord as his God.

It implied also that Jacob became God's servant; that from henceforth he did not belong to himself. He belonged to the Lord who had revealed Himself to him, and who had accepted him and given him comfort in his hour of loneliness and strength in his hour of weakness.

2. This experience gave Jacob a new attitude toward his property. Then and there he registered a solemn vow that henceforth he would be a tither. Since he belonged to God, all that he possessed was God's. And in acknowledgment of this ownership he declared his purpose to give God a tenth of all that came into his possession. Jacob was far from being the man he should be. There was a tremendous amount of clay among the gold. But with all his faults, he was far ahead of many a twentieth century Christian. There are many of us to-day that fancy ourselves of a rather matured faith who are miles behind this very imperfect saint in this respect.

3. This experience brought to Jacob the beginning of a new power born of a new faith in God. Any man who can say with conviction, "This is the gate of heaven," is for that reason a stronger man. You remember when Elijah had been taken home to heaven how a number of prophets who had not been privileged to see this marvelous home-going, and to whom the unseen was therefore in large measure the unreal, were weakened by this translation rather than strengthened. They went beating about the hills, saying, "Where is Elijah?" But Elisha, who had been privileged to see, no longer inquired for Elijah. He said, "Where is the Lord, God of Elijah?" And it was in this power that he wrought his wonders. The man who is able to say, "This is the gate of heaven," has a strength and

power to which the man without this experience is a stranger.

VI

Here, then, is an experience full of richness, full of helpfulness, full of joy. It was an experience that was possible even in the dim centuries before Jesus came. It is an experience that is far more possible now. For we are living in the age of the Spirit. We are living when the Holy Spirit is ready to take the things of Christ and show them unto us. We are living in a time when every man, regardless of his circumstances, regardless of his past, may come into a saving and satisfying sense of God. A broad stairway stretches right from your feet into the open doorway of the house of many mansions. In the Church, in the sick room, on the street, in the place of business, you may be enabled by the power of God to say, "This is the gate of heaven." May we claim our privileges, not only for the sake of our own needy lives, but for the sake of those about us whose needs are great as our own.

VII

THE FORKS OF THE ROAD—MOSES

Hebrews 11: 24-26

"By faith Moses, when he was come to years, refused to be called the son of Pharaoh's daughter; choosing rather to suffer affliction with the people of God, than to enjoy the pleasures of sin for a season; esteeming the reproach of Christ greater riches than the treasures in Egypt: for he had respect unto the recompense of the reward."

I

Moses is at the forks of the road. A very revealing place is this spot where the roads fork. Here every man shows himself for what he is. One man comes to the forks of the road and undertakes to stand perfectly still. He is afraid to turn either to the right hand or to the left lest he go wrong. Or he travels the road to the left for a season, then retraces his steps and for another season travels the road to the right. Such conduct indicates that he is afflicted with the fatal malady of indecision. When Moses comes to the forks of the road he refuses the one and sets himself steadfastly to travel the other. By so doing he shows himself a man of decision.

II

There were two elements in this decision of Moses, as there are in all decisions.

1. There was a negative element. "Moses when he was come to years refused." That is, there was something to which Moses said "No." And, mark you, his "No" was a full-fledged, one hundred per cent negative. It was not tinctured with a single ounce of "Yes." So often when we say "No" it is lacking in positiveness. Likewise, when we say "Yes," there is a weakness about it that indicates an admixture of the negative. Moses, when he stood at the forks of the road, looked at both roads, and to one of them he said a positive, vigorous, out and out "No."

2. But Moses did more than say "No." He did something more than refuse to take a certain road. He also said "Yes." He refused to travel one way, not that he might stand still, but that he might travel another way. So often we content ourselves with a mere refusal. When we hear the call of Christ almost the first thought that comes into our mind is not that to which we are to say "Yes," but that to which we are to say "No." We think of the Christian life on its negative side rather than on its positive side. We think of what we are to quit being and doing rather than what we are to become and what we are to do.

Now, it is altogether right to remember that certain things must be given up in order for us to become followers of Jesus Christ. But we must also remember this: That no amount of negatives will make us Christians. No man ever becomes a Christian by virtue of what he does not do. No amount of "don'ts" summed up will equal a saint, as no amount of ciphers summed up will equal a unit. Therefore, it is the poorest possible plea, when we respond to Christ's call to become disciples by enumerating the wicked things that we do not do. It is necessary to be able to say "No." But to

simply say "No" and stop there is to end in utter moral failure.

There is a handsome wax figure in one of the stores on Main Street. When I approached him and told him where he could get a case of bootleg liquor, he refused to be interested. When I told him where he could bet on a sure thing, he was also indifferent. When I sought to amuse him with a smutty story, he had the decency not to be amused. When I complimented his competitor on the opposite side of the street, he did not turn green with envy. To every temptation he said a very positive "No." But when encouraged by his refusals to do the wrong, I invited him to prayer meeting, he was as unresponsive as the average church member. And when I passed the collection plate, he did not even see it. Therefore, I cannot call this gentlemanly wax figure a Christian. He is as far from being a saint as death is far from life.

The truth of the matter is that Christ is calling on you to say "No" not simply because he wants you to practice self-denial as an end. He is calling on you to say "No" to the lower because that is absolutely necessary in order for you to say "Yes" to the highest. He is asking you to say "No" to the darkness because in no other way can you say "Yes" to the light. He is asking you to say "No" to the mud puddle in order that you may say "Yes" to the infinite sea. He is asking you to say "No" to the ant hill in order that you may say "Yes" to the majestic mountain. He is asking you to say "No" to sin in order that you may say "Yes" to righteousness. He is asking you to say "No" to uselessness in order that you may say "Yes" to usefulness. He is asking you to say "No" to the Devil in order that you may say "Yes" to Himself.

III

This decision of Moses was costly.

1. There was much to be given up.

(1) This decision involved the giving up of the highest social position in all the land of Egypt. It was to pass in one step from this high position, not to a lower rank, but to the very lowest. It was to cease to be the son of the Egyptian princess in order to become the son of a Hebrew slave. And, mark you, social position is not a thing that we despise. There are people that are willing to pay almost any price to win and retain a high social standing. I have seen mothers willing to give their pure and tender daughters to dance with men that they knew to be libertines just in order to get them into society. When, therefore, Moses said "No" to this high social position, he said "No" to something that makes a tremendous appeal to the average man and woman.

(2) When Moses made this decision, he said "No" to the pleasures of Egypt. The Egypt of that day was the New York of modern life. It was the playground of the world. Here every pleasure could be enjoyed, from the most fastidious and refined to the most bestial and vulgar. All these pleasures were within reach of the hand of Moses. And, therefore, when he said "No," he rejected all that could appeal to a man who was in love with worldly pleasure.

(3) His decision involved the giving up of the treasures of Egypt. The Egypt of that day was the granary of the world. Down from its unknown source every year came the Nile, giving to Egypt its fertility. To Egypt came the ships and caravans of many nations, carrying away her grain and leaving behind their silver and gold.

Much of this treasure went into the coffers of Pharaoh. When Moses, therefore, said "No" to the treasures of Egypt, he refused to grip and hold vast wealth that might have been his for the taking.

(4) For Moses to make this decision was to bring bitter disappointment to one who loved him, and to whom he was under very great obligations. I think we have never given sufficient credit to this Egyptian princess who was Moses' foster mother. The fact that she was a heathen did not prevent her from being a good woman. It did not rob her of a mother heart. When that strange craft afloat on the Nile was found, and when its lone occupant pelted this Egyptian princess with his weakness and cannonaded her with his tears, she had the grace and the tenderness to capitulate. She took this little waif to her heart and protected him. It was to her that he owed his life. It was to her that he owed the fact that he had been educated in the royal universities. It was by no means easy, therefore, for a big-souled man like Moses to disappoint one who had thus helped him and who tenderly loved him.

2. But the cost of this decision of Moses is not to be measured alone by what he gave up. What he chose in place of it all was also costly. When he refused all that Egypt had to offer, what did he accept in its stead? When he said "No" to the privileges that might have been his as the son of Pharaoh's daughter, to what did he say "Yes"?

(1) He chose suffering. "Moses, when he was come to years, refused to be called the son of Pharaoh's daughter, choosing rather to suffer affliction with the people of God." This is an arresting statement. Here is a man facing a road that he knows will lead him to suffering, to agony, to disappointment, to battle and

conflict and tears. Yet, with his eyes wide open, he makes the choice. He does not dream for a moment that when he identifies himself with a horde of slaves he is going to have an easy time. He does not fool himself into believing that the course upon which he has decided will be all sunshine and all laughter. He knows that there will be battles to fight. He knows that there will be heavy burdens to be borne. He knows that there will be many a misunderstanding and many a disappointment and many a heartache. Yet, with his eyes wide open, and alive to all that is involved, he chooses to suffer affliction with the people of God.

IV

How did Moses come to make this choice?

1. He had a clear eye for distinguishing right from wrong. How easy it is for us to persuade ourselves that the thing we want to do is the thing we ought to do! How easy it would have been for Moses to have accepted the career that was open to him as the son of Pharaoh's daughter! He might have reminded himself of the large service rendered by Joseph. Joseph had saved his people in the past not by descending, but by ascending. Joseph had become prime minister of Egypt. He himself might have promised a kindred salvation by keeping his position as the son of Pharaoh's daughter. But he refused to let his own interests blind him. He saw that to cling to his rights would be to sin. He refused to blind himself to the fact that it was not simply sinful to choose the lowest, it was also sinful to choose the second best. He realized that God was calling him to choose the highest and to fail to so choose was to sin.

2. He knew that the pleasures and gains of sin are

only temporary. Sin is only charming in the present or in the immediate future. It has no charm in the past. How fascinating is sin a moment before it is committed! How absolutely necessary it seems to our happiness! But when it slips into the past its pearly teeth become ugly fangs, its shapely hands become unshapely claws, its winsome tresses become writhing serpents. The sin of the future often seems as fair as an angel from heaven, but the sin of yesterday is as ugly as a fiend from hell.

What a pity that we do not have this clear insight possessed by Moses. He faced the fact that there were pleasures in sin. The Bible everywhere confesses that fact. Sin has its laughter and its song and its sunshine. Sin has its pleasures, but they do not last. Its most brilliant career soon comes to an end. Its brightest day soon closes. Its sweetest draught is soon drunk. Its fairest flowers are soon faded. Choose the way of sin if you will, and though you may laugh, your laughter will be but temporary. Though you may rejoice, your joy will be as fleeting as a shadow. Then one day when the laughter has all died and your roses are all withered and your songs are all hushed, you will have a whole eternity in which to curse yourself.

3. He had a keen eye for the things of real value. So clearly did he see, that he esteemed the reproach of Christ greater riches than the treasures of Egypt. It took a man deeply schooled in permanent values to reach that conclusion. The treasures of Egypt loomed large. They seemed very genuine and very weighty and very abiding. The reproach of Christ—how uninviting! How lacking in winsomeness! Yet Moses decided that the thing of real value was not the wealth of Egypt,

but the reproach of Christ. What a seeing eye did this man possess!

4. Then Moses looked away from everything else to the coming reward. He believed that the future belongs not to sin but to righteousness. He believed it is the heritage, not of the holders of the treasures of Egypt, but of those who share the reproach of Christ. He refused to allow temporary gain to blind him to the gain that is eternal. He looked away from everything else to the coming reward. He looked away from Egypt's splendor and power. He looked away from Egypt's molehills and ant heaps to the majestic mountains that loomed in the hazy distance. His faith gave him at once the far view and the true view. "He had respect unto the recompense of the reward."

V

And what was the outcome of this decision?

1. Moses received the reward of a Christlike character. Do you see that man coming down from the mountain with face that is strangely alight? Do you find your eyes dazzled in his presence as if you were looking upon a sunrise? Whose is the face that must needs have a veil to cover it before we can look upon it? It is the face of a man who refused the treasures of Egypt and chose the reproach of Christ. The splendor of his face has not come to him from long gazing upon silver and gold. Such a gaze hardens the face and darkens all its radiance. Whence, then, came this winsome light? It has come from looking upon God. Had Moses remained in Egypt he would have missed many a conflict and struggle. He would also have missed a face

lighted with the light that shines in the face of Jesus Christ.

2. Through this decision Moses was able to render a great service to his own nation and to the world. "Whose are those white tents in the valley?" I ask him one day. "They are the tents of God's chosen people, Israel," he answers. "Israel?" I reply in amazement. "I thought Israel was in bondage. I thought her people were slaves. I thought they were giving themselves solely to the task of brick making." "They were," he replies, "till I came. But by the grace of God I have led them from bondage to freedom."

But I am in doubt as to whether Moses' service in freeing his people has been greatly worth while. They are such a peevish and fretful and whining lot. They are forever lusting for the flesh pots of Egypt. They are constantly complaining to Moses because he has not left them to die in the land of bondage. I cannot convince myself that his task has been worth the doing. So I speak my mind:—"Pardon me, Moses. You have made a heroic fight. You have set your people free. But they are a cantankerous lot, and I fear your labor has been almost, if not quite, in vain."

But Moses does not seem to share my doubts. "Israel does not count for much now," he replies, "but remember that he is only a child. He has by no means arrived, but he is on the way. You may not believe it, but he will yet render the world a great service. One day he is going to write a Book, and that Book will do more than all other books to banish the world's wrongs and the world's night and to bring in a reign of righteousness. One day he is going to give to the world an Isaiah with his inspired eloquence, and a Jeremiah with his broken heart and his streaming tears. One day

he is going to give to the world a skylark named David and a flaming missionary named Paul. One day there is going forth from his little country the best of all good news:—'Behold, I bring you glad tidings of great joy, for there is born unto you this day a Saviour, which is Christ the Lord.' Israel does not count for much yet. But he is on the way toward bringing the whole world into his debt."

3. Then, incidentally, this decision enabled Moses to win heaven. The New Testament makes us sure of this. Read the story of the Transfiguration. Christ has come. He is struggling under the burden of his coming Cross. He needs help such as those deeply schooled in the mystery of suffering alone can give. Therefore, two men, passed from earth long years ago, came to talk with Him of His coming crucifixion. Who are they? One of them is the man who esteemed the reproach of Christ greater riches than the treasures of Egypt. Whence does he come? The One to whom he speaks, his own shining face, the whole story, answers that question. He comes from heaven. He is fresh from the house of many mansions. There he had been for long centuries. And there he is at this hour, glad with the joy of those who are forever with the Lord.

We must conclude, therefore, that the best day's work that Moses ever did was when he made possible the writing of this sentence:—"By faith Moses, when he was come to years, refused to be called the son of Pharaoh's daughter; choosing rather to suffer affliction with the people of God than to enjoy the pleasures of sin for a season; esteeming the reproach of Christ greater riches than the treasures of Egypt: for he had respect unto the recompense of the reward." He gave up the passing and the temporal, but he won the wealth that endures.

He won Christlike character. He won abiding usefulness. He won an inheritance among that elect company who "have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb."

VIII

THE ANGELIC DEVIL—BALAAM

Numbers 23: 10

"Let me die the death of the righteous and let my last end be like his."

This beautiful prayer was uttered by an ancient poet-preacher named Balaam. A startling study is the character of Balaam. I have dared to call him the Angelic Devil. It is not a perfect name. It sounds lurid. It savors of the sensational. My one apology for using it, however, is just this: I could think of no other name which seemed more appropriate for this strange prophet who was such a perplexing mixture of good and evil, light and darkness, star dust and mud.

It is Dr. Watkins, I think, who tells of a certain scientific creation known as the diabolical fad. Some scientists learned how to take certain insects in their early stages of development and graft them into each other. For instance, they grafted the spider with the butterfly. The result was a peculiarly hideous monstrosity. It was a creature that wanted at once to fly and to crawl, to seek the sunshine and to seek the black shadows. It wanted to feast off the flowers of spring. It wanted also to feast off a loathsome banquet of dead flies. Some such strange mixture is this man Balaam. He has traits of character so magnificent that we cannot but thrill with admiration. He has other traits that are

so vile that we cannot but shudder. And yet he is altogether human. Do not forget that. He is close akin to ourselves.

I

Now look first at Balaam on his angelic side. How many fine and noble qualities he had!

1. He was an exceedingly brilliant man. He was an orator of great power. Probably the people of his day spoke of him as "Balaam, the silver-tongued," or "Balaam, the golden mouthed." Not only was he a great orator, but he was a poet also, and that of a high order. To be convinced of this, it is only necessary to read the twenty-second, twenty-third and twenty-fourth chapters of Numbers. The man who gave utterance to these bejeweled sentences was certainly no ordinary man. Balaam was greatly gifted. He had gifts, in fact, that fell little short of genius.

2. He had a lofty conception of righteousness. Not even did the Hebrew people themselves run past this great poet-preacher in this respect. Hear Balak's question: "Wherewith shall I come before the Lord, and bow myself before the high God? Shall I come before Him with burnt offerings, with calves of a year old? Will the Lord be pleased with thousands of rams, or with ten thousands of rivers of oil? Shall I give my first-born for my transgression, the fruit of my body for the sin of my soul?" And how majestic is Balaam's answer: "He hath shewed thee, O man, what is good; and what doth the Lord require of thee, but to do justly, and to love mercy, and to walk humbly with thy God." Truly this answer is worthy of the greatest writers of the New Testament.

3. He was a man of very genuine convictions. He had very definite and well defined ideas of duty. To almost all of these convictions he became untrue. But to one of them he remained in a certain literal sense true to the end. He told Balak at the very beginning that if he were to offer him his house full of silver and gold he would not go beyond the word of the Lord to speak less or more. To the letter of this vow he remained true, though he broke the spirit of it into fragments. But when we first meet him he is a man of real convictions.

4. He was possessed of an amazing knowledge of God. He knew how to pray. He knew how to find his way into the secret place of the Most High. God heard his prayers, revealed to him His secrets, spoke to him as friend with friend. So far as the record goes, there was no other man of his time, with the exception of Moses, who enjoyed such an intimacy with God as did Balaam. Prayer seems a habit with him. In our text he is on his knees praying with all sincerity, I think:—"Let me die the death of the righteous and let my last end be like his."

5. He seems sincerely eager for divine guidance. The first time he comes upon the stage he gives an exceedingly good account of himself. This is the story: A delegation composed of the elders of Moab and Midian has come to see him. The purpose of their mission is this: To tell him that a new nation, Israel, is camping upon their borders. That that nation is too great for them to overcome in battle. That, therefore, they beg that he will come and curse them. "For," say they, "whom thou curseth is cursed and whom thou blesseth is blessed."

Now when Balaam received this invitation, he did

that which was quite natural for a really religious man. He said: "I do not know whether I can go with you or not. I will pray over it. I will seek the guidance of God." And he sought that guidance and found it. Men always do when they seek with a single eye. If you really want to know the right, you can know it. God told Balaam he must not go, that Israel was blessed, and to oppose them would be wrong. So Balaam told the delegation frankly that he could not assist them. Then he sent them home. And, in my opinion, Balaam's conduct up to this point could hardly be improved.

II

But in spite of all this, Balaam is not one of the honored saints of the Bible. His name does not appear among the heroes of faith. On the contrary, he is sharply denounced. In fact, I do not think there is another character in the Word of God that is condemned in sharper language than is this man Balaam. Three of the New Testament writers mention him,—Peter, John and Jude. And they all speak of him in terms of bitter condemnation. Their words fairly scorch and burn after all these centuries. Judas is not even spoken of in words so scathing. This is true because Balaam became an utterly bad man. If you watch him in the subsequent days of his career, you will see the devil gaining the victory over the angel

III

His decline is revealed by four separate scenes.

1. Balaam's servant looked out one day and saw a

goodly company coming across the plain. This was another delegation to wait on Balaam. This time the committee was much larger than the first one that came. It was composed of much more prominent men, and they offered a far greater reward. They came saying for their king: "Let nothing hinder you from coming to Balak." "Let nothing"—not even conscience, nor right, nor duty, nor God.

It is here that Balaam has his big chance. What do we expect this princely preacher to say to these men? We expect to see him become a little more erect and his cheek to glow with an honest indignation, and his eagle eye to flash fire. We expect to hear him say: "I told you before that your enterprise was wrong. Do you think the fact that a larger committee has come to see me will make it right? Do you think the fact that you have offered me a larger reward will make a course of action right that was wrong with a smaller reward? If it is wrong to engage in a practice in which only a penny is involved, would it be right to engage in that same practice provided the sum of millions were involved? If it is wrong to do a thing that is unpopular, will the fact that it suddenly becomes popular make it right?

But, sad to say, Balaam made no such answer. Instead he said: "I will ask the Lord again." There is where he began to tamper with his conscience, and, one by one, to blow out the lights within his soul. When he asked God the first time he really wanted to know the right and wrong of the matter. But when he asks God the second time, he is asking not to know what is right, but for the privilege of doing what he knows to be wrong. He is very eager to go to Balak. He wants the promotion and the money. He is also very eager to stay on good terms with God at the same time. He is in a

hard place. To quote F. W. Robertson, from whom I received much help in the preparation of this sermon, "He wants to please himself without displeasing God." So his prayer is simply begging God for an indulgence. It is asking to be allowed to do a known wrong.

Now Balaam prays and prays, till at last he convinces himself that the thing he once thought wrong is right. And the story says that God told him to go. God will not and cannot force Balaam, nor you, nor anybody else, to walk in the path of duty. Balaam on his knees has succeeded only in blinding himself. He has succeeded in that most subtle and dangerous form of lying —lying to oneself. So he rises from his knees resolved to go to Balak.

2. The next scene shows him on his journey. The story informs us that God was angry with him for going, and that the angel of the Lord stood in the way as an adversary against him. It is told in the baldest language. Some may smile over it as a crude myth, and yet it is profoundly true. The ass on which Balaam rides becomes unmanageable. She turns out of the road. Balaam gets angry and strikes her with his staff. She then rubs up against the wall and crushes his foot, and he strikes her again. She then lies flat down and Balaam goes into a towering rage and gives her another hard blow, and wishes for a sword that he may kill her. I know a little how to sympathize with Balaam. I have never ridden a donkey much, but I have had to do with her kinsfolk. Even dealing with mules is not always conducive to sweetness of temper.

But what is the meaning of all this? Why is this preacher so irritable? How is it that you sometimes go into a surprising rage over the merest trifle? How

comes it that the slamming of a door or the dropping of a plate oftentimes turns you into an active volcano? How is it that at times you are as easily touched off as a powder magazine? You call it nerves. Maybe so. But many times those nerves have come about as a result of disloyalty to your conscience. There is civil war within. Your soul is like a sea billowed by a tempest. For no man ever goes wrong that he does not go against God, and no man ever goes against God except in wretchedness. "There is no peace, saith my God, to the wicked."

So Balaam loses his temper. He gets his foot crushed into the bargain. He is crippled by his wrong doing. Many of us are crippled from the same cause. I wonder if you have a crushed foot to-night. Oh, the reason I am not more fleet in the errands of my Lord is because my own sin has crippled me. Some of us have crushed feet, crushed hands, crushed hearts. This is true, not because God does not love us. It is true because we have turned away from God, and, as Balaam, "have loved the wages of unrighteousness."

Now Balaam proposes to go back, but the Lord tells him to go on. I do not know how to explain this strange angel of the Lord who at one time opposes the preacher, and at the same time urges him on, except to say that it is altogether true to life. When a man seeks honestly to do right he sees clearly, but when he begins to try to do right and wrong at the some time, he gets confused. "If thine eye be single, thy whole body shall be full of light. But if thine eye be evil, thy whole body will be full of darkness. And if the light which is in thee be darkness, how great is that darkness." As surely as you and I are here, the man that plays loose

with his conscience will stultify and kill his conscience. The man that refuses to see straight will lose his capacity to see straight.

3. In the third scene Balaam has come to Balak. Seven altars are built. And seven rams and seven bullocks are offered for sacrifice. Balaam reaffirms the one rule that he will not violate, and that he never does violate. He declares that he is going to say what God tells him to say at all costs, and he does this. But while he does it, he is at the same time guilty of the most tragic and fatal dishonesty. He determines that he will speak the truth as he sees it, but at the same time he does his best to keep from seeing the truth. His very first glance at the camp of Israel shows to him that they are blessed. But he proceeds to go from one place to another trying to get a partial view of them in the hope of blinding himself so as to be able to do the bidding of the man who has hired him and thus to win his reward.

I know what some of you are ready to say. It is this:—"Nobody would be so big a fool as that. He would not speak what the Lord showed him and yet try to keep the Lord from showing him anything." Yes, but there you are wrong. There are millions of Balaams. There are scores of them, I dare say, in this house. Here is a man, for instance, who says he will become a Christian if somebody will explain certain problems of the Bible to him. But he never seeks to have them explained. He has no interest in their explanation. Told that the sun is rising in the east, he faces the west.

Or take this situation. A preacher of our denomination cannot marry a divorced couple except they have been divorced for the one scriptural reason—infidelity.

But a man comes to me one day, pays me a delightful fee in advance, and asks me to marry him. I proceed to marry him and ask no questions. You speak to me about it next day and tell me he was divorced. I am surprised and say I did not know it. I took pains not to ask a single question lest I should know it. I am not only breaking my vows of ordination, I have not only proven untrue to the teaching of my Master, but I have stuck my head in the sand like an ostrich and have refused to see the facts.

There was a man in Tennessee a few years ago who undertook to run a school after the type of the famous Webb School. The discipline at Webb School is strict. If a boy will not behave, he is sent home. This man wanted a reputation for strictness, but he wanted to get the money from the pockets even of the disobedient. He would declare emphatically that if he saw one of his pupils do a certain thing he would send him home. But a friend of mine who attended the school said of him that he was constantly dodging to keep from seeing his rules violated. He refused to know what he might have known. So Balaam boasted of his honesty in declaring the truth, but he tried hard not to see the truth.

4. The last scene is in the background. Balaam has kept his vow and has had to go away under the displeasure of Balak without the coveted reward. But he could not endure the loss. He came again. And I imagine they met by night, he and Balak, and talked in whispers. And he said, "I cannot curse Israel, I have promised not to,—but I can tell you how to make them curse themselves." And a little later there was a great feast in Moab. The men of Israel were invited. The women of Moab offered themselves at the king's command. And a plague came upon Israel because of their

sin, and men fell by the thousands. And he who refused to curse them by word of mouth, cursed them in the most hideous and devilish way,—by the cunning art of seduction.

By this means I dare say Balaam won his reward. No doubt he thus obtained all the coveted gold that Balak had promised. Doubtless, too, he was promoted to the great honor that had been such a strong temptation. And, best of all, he had been able to win these without giving too severe a wound to his dying conscience. In all probability he congratulated himself upon the fact that he had won his way without deviating one inch from the literal truth.

But while he had clung to the letter, he had thrown the spirit overboard. "While he had kept a rule, he had violated a principle." While he had spoken truth with his lips, he was a most dastardly liar in his heart. And here again, I remark, that Balaam has many sons and daughters. You would not tell that secret entrusted to you for anything. You promised that you would not. But you allow your friend to guess. Then it is so easy to let him know that he has guessed aright. Thus you have the thrill of telling the secret and at the same time keeping your word.

A real estate man of my acquaintance sold a house some time ago. At the date of the sale the house was not wired and there were no arrangements for lighting. The buyer had it put in the contract that there should be a drop light in each room. Now that agent took drop lights and tacked one to the ceiling of each room. That was all. The house was not even wired. Yet he claimed that he had kept his agreement. And in a certain literal sense he had. But what a cheap liar he was!

And such lying is doubly dangerous because it passes itself off for truth, thus blinding its victim to his own rottenness.

IV

To what goal did this road bring Balaam? What became of this gifted genius who spoke for God? What was the end of him who prayed in all sincerity that he might die the death of the righteous? The record tells the story. He did not die the death of the righteous. He died the death of the wicked. He fell amidst the forces of the enemy with the sword of Israel thrust through his heart. And to-day he stands out before us a charred and blackened ruin, the most bitterly denounced man in the Bible. What was the matter? Did he not pray to die the death of the righteous? Yes, but he was not willing to live the life of the righteous. He loved the wages of unrighteousness. He loved them so well that he lost his all in a mad effort to win them. "Let him that thinketh he standeth take heed lest he fall."

IX

THE OX DRIVER—SHAMGAR

Judges 3:31

"And after him was Shamgar, the son of Anath, who slew of the Philistines six hundred men with an oxgoad; and he also delivered Israel."

1

Israel at this time was in sore need of a deliverer. They were completely at the mercy of their old time enemies, the Philistines. Through persistent raids their conquerors had reduced them to almost utter want. If any Israelite succeeded in cultivating a crop of wheat, no sooner would he have it threshed than the Philistines would swoop down upon him like birds of prey and carry it all away. Or if any succeeded in raising a small flock or herd, these were driven off before they were ready for the slaughter. Thus the people were often in dire want. For this reason also they lived in constant fear. Their highways were growing up because the people dared not travel them.

In the wake of this calamity came quite naturally the yet heavier one of utter discouragement. The people saw no chance to fight back. Their conquerors had seen to it that they should remain completely at their mercy. To gain this end they had compelled them to give up all weapons of war. They had taken the further precaution of allowing no single blacksmith to remain in

Israel. Thus they were not only without weapons, but they were without any chance of making any. It is not to be wondered at, therefore, that the morale of the nation was broken. They were not only defeated, but they were hopeless in their defeat. They had no expectation of a better day. They had lost confidence in themselves. Worst of all, they had lost faith in God. The truth of the matter is that their disloyalty to Him was the very fountain source of all their trouble. It would be hard, therefore, to imagine a people in sorer straits than were the people of Israel when Shamgar came upon the scene.

II

But even to these utterly defeated people deliverance came. And I can well imagine that it came from a source from which they least expected it. The man who wrought this deliverance for them was not a man of position. He was not a man with any royal blood in his veins. He was not, so far as we know, a man of the schools. Doubtless he had never had one single day of military training. He was a man of the people. He was a farmer. Had he lived in our day we would have possibly called him a hayseed. He had never cut any great figure on the public stage. His greatest achievement thus far had been the breaking and driving of a yoke of oxen. Yet it was this ox driver that God chose to work deliverance in Israel.

III

Why did God choose him? He did not choose him because he was a man obscurely placed. He did not choose him because of his disadvantages. Nor did he

choose him because he was a special favorite of heaven. He chose him because Shamgar possessed those qualities that made it possible for God to make use of him for this great service.

1. Shamgar was possessed of a noble discontent. Now much of our discontent is ignoble. Much of it is petty and unworthy. Sometimes it is born of an effort on our part to keep up socially, or in some other way, with our neighbors. Our little bungalow suited us well enough till our neighbor builded a more pretentious house. We were well pleased with our Ford till he began to ride in a Dodge. After this we felt discontented and disgusted with that which in other days had pleased us well enough.

Some of our discontent is born of mere restlessness. Many of us are like children. We demand that we be amused all the time. We want to go from one party to another, or from one movie to another, or from one pleasure and pastime to another. We want somebody to be "booing" at us and "cooing" at us and making us laugh. And if such things are not going on all the time, we become restless and wretched and bored. But this is not noble discontent. It is the discontent of a shallow heart and an empty head.

There is no littleness in the discontent of Shamgar. It made his soul within him sick that he himself was so cowed and whipped and humiliated. It filled him with inner rage to see his people thus enslaved. When he saw the wheat of his neighbor carried off, when he saw his own cattle driven away to become the food of his enemies, he could not take it complacently. He could not look upon it as an inevitable calamity that must be borne. The sight made him clinch his fists. It filled his soul with rage and hot rebellion.

Now because Shamgar was filled with a burning discontent against things as they were, there was hope for him. He was a million leagues ahead of the man who had compelled himself to a kind of cowardly contentment. It is bad to be whipped, but to be content to remain so is infinitely worse. It is bad to be in the prison house of your foes, but to lodge there till you no longer care for freedom, that is more tragic still. To be in the Far Country among the swine is a terrible calamity. But to come to the place where you are content to live there, where you feel at home among the stench and the filth of it all, that is the very climax of calamity. To be in the Church and yet count for nothing is extremely pathetic. To be a spiritual pigmy, a moral dwarf, that is tragic indeed. But to come to the place where you persuade yourself that that is God's best for you, that is the supreme tragedy.

That is an old story of the eagle that was hatched along with a family of chicks. His fellow chickens laughed at the awkward brownish bird. He looked very funny indeed as he tried to pick up the little grain of the barnyard with his great hooked beak. He seemed to those chickens strangely out of place. And, good to say, he seemed to himself yet more strangely out of place. He did not know exactly what he was made for. But he was sure he was not made for that. So he stood day after day the picture of discontent, the embodiment of wretchedness.

But one sunny morning there came a far off speck in the sky. Then there was a strange wild call from the heights. And this ungainly bird, this ridiculous chick, that had been the laughing stock of the barnyard, looked up as if he understood the cry. And the call came again and nearer. And then fire seemed suddenly

to glow in the lack-luster eyes of the barnyard fowl. And the chicks stood away in wonder. And the bird spread his burnished brown wings and circled above the barnyard, and then he was away to the freedom of his mountain wilds. He was made for the cloudland and the upper air. Therefore, he could never be content scratching among the filth of the barnyard.

"I envy not in any mood
The prisoner void of noble range,
The linnet born within the cage
That never knew the summer wood.
Or what may count itself as blessed,
The heart that never plighted troth,
But stagnates in the weeds of sloth
Nor any want begotten rest.
I hold it true whate'er befall,
And feel it when I sorrow most,
'Tis better to have loved and lost
Than never to have loved at all."

If you are away from God to-night, that is a calamity. If you are wasting your substance in riotous living, or if you are wasting your substance in very decent and respectable living, that is a terrible tragedy. But there is something far worse. That is to be satisfied to do so. To be content with the worst when you might have the best. Or, what more often happens, to be content with the second best when you might claim the best. What have you gained of abiding value to-day by rejecting Jesus Christ? What would you have lost of abiding worth if you had followed Him this day? You are being cheated every day. But, sadder still, I fear some of you are becoming content to be cheated. That is the road to a wasted life. Shamgar was full of a

noble discontent. That was the first step toward his becoming a deliverer.

2. Shamgar was a man of faith. He could see the difficulties as well as the men among whom he lived. He could realize the strength of the Philistines as well as they. He could realize the weakness of the Israelites. He understood quite as well as they that there were no weapons with which to fight. He himself had doubtless never seen a sword except when it had flashed in the hands of a Philistine. But the difficulties were not all that Shamgar saw. He saw the forces that make for conquest. He knew something of the history of his people. He knew how God had made bare His arm for their deliverance from the bondage of Egypt. He knew how again and again God had come upon the scene to work in their behalf. In this awful and trying time, I have no doubt Shamgar turned with strong faith toward God. He recognized the fact that all the deliverances that God had ever wrought had been through human instrumentality. He believed in the willingness of God to use men. He even went further than that. He believed in God's willingness to use himself. It does not take a great faith for me to say, "I believe God uses men." But it does take a great faith for me to say, "I believe that God will use me." It is with this vital faith that Shamgar set about his task.

3. Shamgar dared to make a beginning. He ventured to fight when the enemy came upon him, in spite of the meanness of the weapon that he had in his hand. He had the courage to do battle regardless of the odds that were against him. I imagine I hear him saying to himself, "Right here and right now I am going to stake my all on an effort to win deliverance from my enemies. They may rob me and kill me. There is every chance

that they will. But that is what would likely happen if I refused to fight. Hence I am going to fight."

And this he did, in spite of the fact that he had excellent excuses for refusing to do so. Had he come home at the close of the day without the bread for which his children hungered, he could at least have given them some very plausible excuses for not having made good. He might have said, for instance: "I was outnumbered hundreds to one. You could not expect me to stand up against such odds as that. I did not have a chance."

If they had felt that his failure was not justified by this excuse, he had another. "My foes," he might have said, "were armed. They all had swords. I did not have a thing except an oxgoad. I had only that old stick that I use to prod my cattle. Surely you are not unreasonable enough to think that I ought to have stood against that crowd that was armed with swords when I was one lone man with nothing but an oxgoad." These would have been very plausible excuses. But Shamgar was not good at excusing himself. He was better at fighting.

So when the enemy came upon him, instead of running he stood his ground. You can hear that oxgoad crack upon their skulls as he wields it lustily. He is saying to himself, "I may go home to-night without a bit of bread, but I will at least carry some scars to show that I made an honest effort. I may not get home at all, but when those who love me come to seek me they will find that I did not die as a coward dies. I will die fighting. I will die using every resource that God put at my disposal." Shamgar had only an oxgoad, but he had that. So instead of waiting for a better weapon, and instead of saying what he would do if he were more fully equipped, he used what was in his hand.

IV

And what was the outcome? Shamgar won the fight. The man who throws himself with what he has on the side of God always wins. When the lad brings his five loaves and two fishes and turns them over to Jesus, he has done his part. If Christ does not feed the multitude then, it is His own fault and not the lad's. If Shamgar strikes with his might with the weapon that God has given him, and then goes down in defeat, nobody can blame Shamgar. If you put yourself, your talents, your abilities in God's hands this night and then miss your crown, you can cry: "Unjust! unjust!" till you shake the foundations from under heaven. All God needs, all God requires for the winning of the battle in your life is for you to put yourself in His hands.

And not only did Shamgar win deliverance for himself, but he won deliverance for his people. Not only was he himself blessed, but he became a blessing. He seems a crude instrument for God to use in such mighty fashion. His battered oxgoad seems a poor weapon for Shamgar to use. But after all it is not so much the instrument that counts. It is the hand that wields it, and the heart that backs the hand.

What does God's call mean to you at this hour? It is not to wait for an easier time or for an easier place in which to set yourself to the task of being a Christian. That time and that place will never come. Your one duty is to begin in the here and now to face your foes with the weapon that you have in your hands. If you will make a beginning, you then put yourself in touch with the might of our infinite Lord. When Jesus said to the paralyzed man, "Arise and walk," He was call-

ing on him to do the one thing that he could not do. But as the man dared to undertake it, the impossible became possible. And if you will dare this night to put yourself in the hands of Jesus Christ, He will work a mighty deliverance for you personally. Not only so, but he will make you a power for the deliverance of others. Only dare to begin, and the very might of God is yours for the winning of your battle.

X

THE EASY MARK—ELI

I Samuel 3: 13

> "For I have told him that I will judge his house for ever for the iniquity that he knoweth; because his sons made themselves vile, and he restrained them not."

This message of God to Eli is a sentence of doom. It tells of a coming judgment, not only upon this man himself, but upon all his house. No culprit at the bar was ever more surely sentenced to death than is this man sentenced. Sharing in his condemnation, in his heavy doom, are those that he most tenderly loves. "For I have told him that I will judge his house for ever for the iniquity that he knoweth; because his sons made themselves vile and he restrained them not."

I

Who was the man thus sentenced?

We should naturally suppose that he was one of the great outstanding sinners of the Bible. But such was not the case. On the contrary, he was a very pious and aged priest. He was a man who for over forty years had been judge in Israel. More than forty years it had been his task to hear God's message and to be God's spokesman to men. He was amiable and inoffensive. There was not a man living, I dare say, who

could point out one single wrong thing that he had ever done. He was as guiltless of any aggressive crime as a new born babe.

Not only was he a harmless and amiable and inoffensive man, but he was a man of very genuine virtues.

1. Though old in years he had a youthful heart. It speaks well for the lad Samuel that he could love this white-haired old man, Eli. But it speaks no less well for Eli that he loved Samuel, and love him he did with a passionate devotion. It is beautiful to see these two together. It is fine to see Maytime and December thus drawn into bonds of tender friendship. It is good to see springtime thus in fellowship with winter. It is beautiful thus to see the sunrise and the sunset walking arm in arm. The deep love of Eli for Samuel shows that this old priest still had a heart that was at once kind and youthful.

2. Eli was generous. For long years he had been God's priest. It had been his task to hear God's message and speak that message to man. But now he sees himself being set aside. One who is easily young enough to be his grandson is taking his place. Samuel is an immeasurable distance behind him in point of that wisdom that is born of experience. Eli knows this quite well. Yet Samuel is being called to the place of honor and responsibility, and he himself is being deposed. Samuel is destined to increase, but he is going to decrease. But Eli does not rebel. He does not grow bitter. He does not give way to envy and say hard things about his successor. He is a man possessed of a beautiful generosity.

3. He is a man of fine spiritual insight. Young Samuel did not yet know the vocation to which God was calling him. There were voices speaking within

his heart, but Samuel did not know how to interpret these voices. But his old friend, Eli, knew. And Samuel was most fortunate in having him for his teacher. He it was that told young Samuel that the voices that he had thought only human were the calls of God. He it was that instructed him to say, "Speak, Lord, for thy servant heareth." For he knew, even in that far off day, that the man who was willing to do God's will would know. He knew that if in all our ways we should acknowledge Him, he would direct our path. He was a man of fine spiritual insight.

4. He was beautifully submissive to the will of God. When Samuel came to him with this stern and terrible message, a message that was fraught with deepest doom and bitterest heartache, how did he receive it? There is no word of complaint. There is no word of bitter criticism. There is absolutely nothing of rebellion. He simply bows his head and heart, and these words fall from his lips: "It is the Lord. Let Him do as seemeth Him good." Any man who can speak like that is certainly not a bad man. Any man who can so speak is certainly not far from the Kingdom of God. It would be hard to find a man more beautifully ready to suffer the will of God.

II

What then was wrong with Eli? Why was this stern sentence pronounced, not against his house simply, but against himself as well? Let me repeat, he was guilty of no crime. He had never robbed a widow's house and for a pretense made long prayers. He had not deliberately shut the door of the Kingdom of Heaven against men. He was not a drunkard nor a rake nor a libertine.

He had never stolen the blush from a maiden's cheek. He had never by any deliberate and outbreaking sin brought dishonor to himself nor to the high and holy office that he was called upon in the providence of God to fill. I feel confident that those who knew him could say in all truthfulness, "I never knew Eli to be guilty of doing a single wicked and ugly deed."

What then was wrong? We find the answer in the text: "For I have told him that I will judge his house for ever for the iniquity that he knoweth; because his sons made themselves vile, and he restrained them not." He is guilty because of what he failed to do. He himself was not guilty of positive and aggressive sin. His sons were. The evil doings of his sons were not hidden from his eye. He had thorough knowledge of their wickedness. He was thoroughly familiar with the fact that they were bringing shame upon themselves and shame upon the high office of the priesthood to which he had called them. Thus he became partner in their sin. Thus he became a sharer in their guilt and in their doom.

Why did he not restrain these wicked sons of his? Dr. Whyte says that it was because he was too busy; that with the duties of being at once priest and judge, he had no time for the ruling of his own house. But here I must be rash enough to differ from this great authority. Too great absorption in his work might have prevented his knowing of the wrong doing of his sons. That is usually the case. A man so busy is usually blissfully unconscious of what his own children are doing. But this was not the case with Eli. The text plainly says that he knew.

What, then, I repeat, was the sin of Eli? I am convinced that it was weakness. He was too soft. He was

too easy. There was no staunchness in him. He was not willing to resist unto blood striving against sin. He was a loving father. But he was not loving enough to seem at times unloving. He was not kind enough to exercise a parental authority that might have seemed to his sons for the present unkind. Those Godless sons of his knew their father for an easy mark. And that knowledge made their choice of the downward way an easier choice. Thus it also helped to bring upon themselves and upon their father the heavy doom pronounced in this text.

III

Eli, then, preaches us a most startling sermon on the failure of pious softness.

1. It is a failure because it falls far short of Christlikeness. This is true even when it is most amiable and kind. There are many people who forget this. There are numbers who think that all that is necessary to be a Christian is simply to be affable and good natured and courteous. They seem to fancy that about the most Christlike thing one can do is to never get into anybody's way, never step on anybody's toes, never hurt anybody's feelings. Their whole duty is done by being suave and polite and thoroughly agreeable. They would never think of being so rude as to take a positive stand on a moral question lest by so doing they should wound the feelings of somebody else.

A Christian must be made of sterner stuff. To be Christlike is to be courteous, but it is to be much more. Our Lord was a fighter. He was the most courageous battler that ever set foot on this planet. He was the most relentless and uncompromising foe of evil that

our world has ever seen. I am aware that this is not the impression that we get when we look upon the face of Christ as portrayed by most of the artists. As a rule they depict Him as a man capable of much patient suffering, but of little bold resistance. He is beautifully tender, but he is not grandly strong. But such is not the face that looks out upon us from the pages of the New Testament. Here is a Christ who is both tender and strong. He is patient to suffer the will of God. He is also courageous to do the will of God.

For instance, Jesus went one day into a synagogue. There were present some heartless religionists who were bent on robbing a man with a withered hand of his blessing. And what did Jesus do? He was not passive. He was not merely agreeable and courteous. The story says that He looked round about upon them with anger. It was an anger that scorched and blistered and burned. It was an anger that those men who felt it never forgot. It was an anger that stamped itself deep on the memory of His disciples. John wrote about it fifty years later. We can almost see the pallor of fear on his face as he speaks of the wrath of the Lamb.

On another day Jesus went into the Temple. He found that it was being desecrated. He found it being changed into a den of thieves and robbers. Heartless money-grubbers were there plying their trade. And what was His reaction? Did he go aside and say how sorry he was? Did He tell what He would do but for fear He would hurt the feelings of those thievish desecraters? He did not. He seized a scourge of small cords, and you can hear the lash of it upon their hard faces across the far spaces of the years. No mild tolerator of evil was Jesus. He was a fighter. He resisted

unto blood striving against sin. And He calls on you and me to do the same thing.

2. Not only does mere amiable weakness fall short of Christianity, it is in great danger of becoming positive evil. Weakness and wickedness are not synonymous, but they are in great danger of becoming so. I know people that are too courteous, according to their idea of courtesy, to be Christian. I have a friend who is so polite that he would make Chesterfield look like a backwoodsman. As long as there is only one side to a question, he gets on beautifully. But whenever there comes a question that has two sides, he takes his position on the fence and begs the pardon of those on both sides for not getting off on their side.

Only this week I was talking to a man who is a member of the Church. He said with a great show of virtue that he had solemnly vowed that he was going to take but two drinks of liquor with anybody. He declared that he would not take more than one if he could help it. That is, he would take but one if he could get off at that without hurting the feelings of the man who had invited him. Why was he drinking? Not because he liked either the taste or the effect of the liquor. He declared that he did not. He was drinking purely to keep from being disagreeable. Thus he was lined up with the bootlegger, with the law-breaker, with the defier of the Constitution, and of common decency; with the violator of the laws of God and of man, just to keep from being disagreeable. Thus does weakness degenerate into wickedness.

3. Softness tends to make one a menace to others. To be an easy mark is not only to endanger yourself, but to endanger others as well. So far as we know Eli

never did a positive wrong in his life. Yet his whole pathway is littered with ruins. He toiled in the service of the Lord for almost a half century. But when the day was closed, he left behind him nothing but a hideous heap of wrecks.

(1) He wrecked his home. Those two boys of his lying dead on the battlefield,—how did they come to be there? They were there because they were dead in heart and dead in soul before they became dead in body. The secret of their deadness of soul was their sin. They themselves were guilty. But their sin clung also to the garments of their father. For the text implies that he might have prevented their sin if he had only had the sturdy, loving courage to do so. This is the charge made against him: "His sons made themselves vile and he restrained them not."

Mark you, the text offers no suggestion as to the method that Eli should have employed in order to have controlled his boys. It is not suggested that he should have resorted to the rod or should have lectured them soundly and sent them to bed. What is implied is that it was within his power to have controlled them by some method. It might not have been within his power when they were twenty-one years of age or even eighteen. If not, then it was within his power in their young and tender years. And since he might have controlled them, it was his solemn duty to do so. It was his duty to God and the church. It was his duty to the State. It was his duty to the boys themselves. In his failure he chose the path of least resistance for himself. But he chose the way of utter ruin for his sons. And it is true to this day that a child is better unborn than uncontrolled.

(2) Eli brought ruin not only upon his home, but also

upon his church. He allowed his sons to minister before the altar when he knew they were utterly corrupt. Thus he caused men to despise the church. Thus he drove them from its portals. Thus he robbed them of the uplift of its ministry. Thus he stole away their faith. What a pathetic story! He gave forty years to the ministry of the church, only to let his sons make a wreck of it in the end. And this he did because he did not have the force and the courage to restrain them.

(3) Not only did he wreck his home and his church, but he brought great hurt to his nation. As the people of Israel turned from the worship of Jehovah, through the corrupting influence of Eli's sons, they lost the courage and the stamina that fitted them to stand against their enemies. They went into battle without the strength and the uplift of the consciousness of the Divine Presence. Thus they went to defeat when they might have gone to victory. Yonder is a runner. He is coming with news from the front. Eli has waited with the utmost anxiety for that news. And what reply does he give to the old man's question? "Israel is fled before the Philistines, and there hath been also a great slaughter among the people, and thy two sons also, Hophni and Phinehas, are dead, and the ark of the Lord is taken." And the old man topples over backwards, breaking his neck, because his heart is already broken.

What a sermon, I repeat, does this pathetic old man with his home and his church and his nation toppling in ruins about him, preach on the tragedy of pious weakness! Could he speak, he might warn us against a like failure with these great words: "Finally, my brethren, be strong in the Lord and in the power of His might. Put on the whole armor of God that ye may

be able to stand against the wiles of the Devil." For our task is not simply to avoid wrong, but to overcome it. We are not here to stand a siege, but to conduct an aggressive campaign. We face stern foes. We must not expect to win without a battle. We cannot destroy evil by politely letting it alone. We cannot kill an enraged tiger with a handful of confetti. We cannot drown a devil fish with a few drops of rose water. We cannot draw the fangs of a cobra with baby talk. Our task demands all our strength and courage, plus the help of God. "Therefore, put on the complete armor of God so that you may be able to stand your ground on the day of battle, and having fought to the end, to remain victors on the field."

XI

THE FIGHTING FARMER—GIDEON

Judges 6: 14

"And the Lord looked upon him, and said, Go in this thy might, and thou shalt save Israel from the hand of the Midianites; have not I sent thee?"

This was God's message to a certain farmer named Gideon. Gideon was at that time beating out his wheat in a wine press. The dust was thick about him, but it was no thicker than his doubts. He was depressed and discouraged, but it was out of this doubting and despairful man that God made a deliverer. Gideon's name has come down to us as one of the heroes of faith. "And what shall I more say? for the time would fail me to tell of Gideon, and of Barak and of Samson and of Jephthah; of David also, and Samuel and of the prophets; who through faith subdued kingdoms, wrought righteousness, obtained promises, stopped the mouths of lions, quenched the violence of fire, escaped the edge of the sword, out of weakness were made strong, waxed valiant in fight, turned to flight the armies of the aliens."

I

Gideon a Doubter.

When we first meet Gideon he does not impress us in the least as being a man of faith. He seems a most

pessimistic doubter. He finds it impossible to reconcile the fact of a present and almighty God with the conditions that confront him. Very clear headed is Gideon. He is possessed of fine common sense. Therefore, as he faces the evil plight of himself and his people, he is driven to this conclusion: Either God is not the kind of God that he has been taught to believe He is, or, for some reason, He is no longer with and for His people.

The God of whom Gideon had learned from the history of his own people was a God of might. He was one who had been able to put His hand on a certain aged shepherd named Moses and set him to the seemingly impossible task of delivering Israel from bondage. This lone man with nothing but his rod in his hand and God in his heart had marched on Egypt and had conquered, and had led forth a horde of slaves. These slaves had crossed the Red Sea as by dry land. They had entered into their inheritance not by the might of their own armies, but by the might of God.

But those glad days were passed. Israel is now a shamed and a defeated people. In their land that God had given them to possess they were the playthings of their enemies. They were robbed and cheated and despoiled. They had been driven to earth. They hardly dared show their heads above ground. Gideon even now is threshing a bit of wheat in a wine press for fear of the enemy. He knows that at any moment they are likely to swoop down upon him and knock him on the head and carry away his little harvest. And God, so far as Gideon can see, is not concerning Himself in the least.

Suddenly a winsome stranger comes upon the scene. Gideon can hardly see his face for the dust, but he

hears the words that he speaks: "The Lord is with thee, thou mighty man of valour." And what is Gideon's reaction to this cheering word? Does he burst forth into song? Does he break into a shout of joy? Does he spring from the wine press with the eagerness of one who is preparing to indulge in the gladness of battle? Not a bit of it.

Here is his answer: "If the Lord be with us, why then is all this befallen us? and where be all His miracles which our fathers told us of?" "Do not tell me," he implies, "that the Lord is with us. I do not believe a word of it. You are simply talking sheerest cant. You are trying to make me take a pious phrase as a substitute for a divine fact. If failure and defeat and slavery are marks of the Divine presence, then the Lord may be with us. But I have been taught that victory and freedom and abounding joy are indications of His nearness and of His help. If the Lord is with us, as you say, then He is not the Lord in whom I have been taught to believe. He must be a very puny and witless god, one who is of no more worth than the gods of the heathen."

Now it is impossible to blame Gideon for being perplexed and full of doubt in his situation. He could see plainly enough that something was wrong. He refused to shut his eyes to the fact that there was little indication at hand of a present and mighty God. Where he made his mistake was this: He failed to see that the fault was not with God, but was with himself and with his people. He was entirely correct in concluding that God was not showing His might as in other days. Where he went wrong was in failing to see that they were making it impossible for God to do what He was able and eager and willing to do. Instead of their

waiting on God, God was having to wait on them. Gideon did not understand this, hence his doubt and perplexity.

Now, there are many to-day who are in the grip of the same kind of doubt that tormented and oppressed Gideon. As they look with open eyes upon our modern world, they are simply driven to this conclusion: either Christ cannot do what the New Testament claims He can do, or we are not giving Him a chance. And some of us are blundering just where Gideon blundered. We are laying the blame on our Lord instead of laying it on ourselves. The turmoil and the confusion that confront us on every hand do not proclaim the failure of God. They proclaim the failure of man to give God a chance.

Why are we standing to-day with almost the same possibilities of a world tragedy that we had in 1914, with the single exception of the fact that many of the nations are bled white? Why did we junk the League of Nations? It was not because the overwhelming majority of men everywhere did not believe in this great "adventure in brotherhood." It was not because we weighed this effort at world-peace in the balance of Christian principle and found it wanting. It was defeated by an appeal to fear, by an appeal to selfishness, by that devil's cry of "America first!" But this failure was not the failure of Christianity. It was the failure of ourselves to give Christianity a chance.

We are perplexed, many of us, by the slow progress of the Church. How far it is from being ideal! How lacking oftentimes in brotherliness, in winsomeness, in power! And yet it is intended to be a glorious Church without spot or blemish by any such thing,—glorious in its unspottedness, in its purity, glorious in its unfailing worth and in its unfading splendor. It is to be fair

as the moon and bright as the sun and terrible as an army with banners,—an institution of which we can sing truly, "Like a mighty army moves the Church of God."

But when we look at actual conditions, we are grieved and disappointed. And we are led to wonder sometimes if Christ spoke actual truth when He said He would build His Church and that the gates of hell should not prevail against it. Again and again it seems that the forces within the gates of hell do prevail and are prevailing. And we wonder why it is so often conquered when it is intended to be a conqueror. Believe this. The fault is not with Jesus Christ, the fault is with the Church. So often He is not allowed to have His way among His own people. So often outside the very door of His own house He has to say: "Behold, I stand and knock."

The same perplexity meets us when we come to regard the individual. We are often disappointed in one another. More often we are disappointed in ourselves. A woman said to me some time ago, "I thought before I became a Christian and entered the Church that if ever I should become a Christian I would be the right sort of Christian. I would be willing to go anywhere and do anything to which my Lord should call me." And then she sighed disappointedly and said: "But I have found that I am very much like the rest of them." And what she implied was, "I have found that after all the business of being a Christian is a very dull and drab and commonplace affair. I have found that though Christ promises much, He really does very little."

And here again let me persuade your own heart that the fault is not with our Lord. He is indeed able to do exceeding abundantly above all that we ask or think.

He is able to make us conquerors. He is able to make all grace abound unto us. He is able to make us winsome with something of His own winsomeness and tender with something of his own tenderness. Not only is He able, but He is unspeakably eager. He yearns that we be at our best. He yearns to give us the best. For "He that spared not His own son, but offered Him up for us all, how shall He not also with Him freely give us all things?"

II

Gideon Became Certain.

If Gideon was a doubter to begin with, he did not remain so. He came into possession of a bracing certainty. He came to be a stalwart man of faith. How was God able to bring him into this roomy place?

1. Gideon was eager to believe. Gideon did not count his doubts as assets. He took no pride in them whatever. He did not boastfully talk them in the conviction that doubt is an unfailing mark of the broad-browed thinker. Possibly he knew that brilliant men are often doubters, and that stupid and third-rate intellects doubt also. Had Gideon been proud of his doubts, he would have doubtless clung to them unto the end of the chapter.

Now many of us are not so wise as Gideon. We count our doubts as our assets. If you are an earnest man, your doubts may be a gateway to a larger faith, but if you are the opposite, they may be the gateway to hell. The wife who doubts her husband is not enriched thereby, neither is the husband who doubts his wife. Certainly no man is to be congratulated simply because he doubts God. And those who pride themselves on

their doubts do so either because of their intellectual egotism or because they seek through their doubts a release from moral obligation. And to so seek such release is to mark yourself a fool. "The fool hath said in his heart there is no God." His trouble was not intellectual but moral. The fact of God imposed restraints to which he did not desire to submit. It brought obligations that he was unwilling to meet. Therefore, he took his doubt and used it as an eraser to rub God out of his universe.

2. Gideon did not allow his doubt to interfere with his duty. Most of Gideon's fellows had lost heart. They said: "God has cast us off. He has forgotten us. He has left us to our enemies. Therefore, we might as well give over our efforts and let things drift. What is the use of raising a flock if the Midianites drive it away as soon as it is ready for the slaughter? What is the use of sowing wheat and harvesting the same only to feed our enemies? What is the use in keeping up the fight under these discouraging and hope-killing circumstances?" So they left off the struggle. But not Gideon. He kept to his task, and when God spoke to him He had to make His voice sound above the sound of his flying flail.

Then, too, Gideon stood ready at the call of God to renounce the forbidden. As God dealt with Gideon He led him to see that the allegiance of himself and of his own family was a divided allegiance. Though servants of Jehovah, they had an altar to Baal. Gideon was wise enough to see that this altar must go, the grove of Baal must be cut down. And that very night Gideon's ax rang in the grove, and when the hour for morning worship came, Baal was a shattered ruin, and the altar of God stood in its place.

What was the outcome? Gideon came into possession of a thorough-going certainty. God dispelled his doubts not by answering all his questions, not by giving him an explanation of all his problems. He brought him into certainty by a revelation of Himself. We read: "The spirit of the Lord came upon Gideon." And Gideon became sure. So also may we. This I say with absolute conviction. I have a right to say it on the authority of Jesus Christ, my Lord. Here is His word: "If any man is willing to do His will he shall know." Not "If he is a man of a certain intellectual or moral bias," not "If he is a man of a certain moral attainment," but "If any man is willing to do His will," he shall pass out of the mists of doubt and perplexity into the bright sunshine of a joyous assurance. Christ challenges every doubter in the wide world, saying, "You need not doubt any longer. You may be as sure of me as you are of your own existence. All that is necessary for this is your own personal surrender. 'Act as if I were and you will find that I am.'"

The truth of this is also attested by the experience of countless men and women. One of the greatest preachers that England ever produced was Frederick W. Robertson. His sermons are as live and vital to-day as when they were preached. Even his pictured face is full of inspiration. One business man said that he kept his picture hanging in the office of his store, and that when he was tempted to do a mean thing, he went and looked at it and found help. But there were years during which this great preacher was bitterly tortured by his doubts. How did he finally triumph? He refused to let his doubts interfere with his duty. He continued to do the right as God gave him to see it till he came to know.

A few years ago I became acquainted with a man living near my church who was said to be a skeptic. I called on him one evening in his own home. He was a rather brilliant talker and disposed to argue. After more than an hour I saw that I was not getting anywhere with him, and I invited him to join with me in prayer. Then I went home feeling that my effort had been almost an utter failure.

Not many days later he came out to church. At the close of the sermon I went back to where he stood far under the balcony to speak to him. I said: "We have talked these matters over. Will you act upon them?" He said, turning to a post by which he was standing: "I would as soon confess my sins to this post as to confess them to Jesus Christ." "Well," I replied, "I will not argue that with you, but I want to ask you one question. Are you satisfied with life as you are living it?" He passed through a momentary struggle, and then said what we both knew was not true. "I am satisfied." "Well," I replied, "I have nothing more to say." And I went away and left him, and he went home seemingly as he came.

There came another day when he was out to the service again. When the invitation was given he came. And when he took my hand he said: "I have come to do what you suggest. I am surrendering to Christ." The service closed, and a number of friends shook hands with him. But he was afraid he would be misunderstood. So he came to me alone and said: "Do not think that I am a Christian. I am a stranger to Jesus Christ. But what I do say is this: that I have done what you told me to do. I have surrendered to Christ, but I do not know Him." "All right," I replied, "that is all I ask, for that is all that God asks." A few days later

his wife told me the remainder of the story. On reaching home he said to her, "Can you pray?" "I will do my best," she replied. So they kneeled in prayer together. But she had hardly begun to pray when this man who had just declared himself a stranger to Christ took the lead of the prayer, and when he arose from his knees he had that light in his face that was never seen on land nor sea. The next time I met him his doubts had utterly vanished, and he was able to say, "I know whom I have believed."

III

The Outcome of Gideon's Certainty.

1. It was when Gideon became sure of the presence of God that he had courage to make a stand against the enemy. It was then that he dared to put the trumpet to his lips and to blow a blast that called the hosts of the Lord together. And the people responded, as they respond to this day to the man everywhere who speaks with an assurance born not of a mere tradition, but born of a personal experience with a personal Christ.

2. It was this certainty of the Divine Presence that gave Gideon the courage to sift the followers that came at his call. A man without faith continually bows down before numbers. His idol is likely to be the multiplication table. A man of faith realizes it is not so much numbers that count, but the people that are numbered. So Gideon selected from those who came at his call the men who were not afraid, and the men who put God first. And with this seemingly insignificant army he wrought deliverance for himself and for his people.

XII

A POPULAR HERO—SAMSON

Judges 16:20

"And he said, I will go out as at other times before and shake myself. And he wist not that the Lord had departed from him."

I

There is no doubt in my mind that Samson, one time Judge in Israel, was an exceedingly popular man. He had qualities that appealed with great power to the people of the age in which he lived. In fact his are qualities that make a strong appeal in every age. This I say, confessing at the same time that, had I been writing the eleventh chapter of the Hebrews, I would in all probability have left Samson out.

1. He was gifted with a happy disposition. He enjoyed a joke. He was full of amusing pranks. He had a ringing laugh in the presence of which the blues somehow vanished. He had a sparkling eye and a cheerful face, at the approach of which gloom had a way of taking to its heels. So cheerful and jolly was he that they could find no name so fitting as Samson, which simply means sunny.

Now the individual who radiates good cheer may have a great many faults and flaws. He may be lacking in a thousand particulars. Even then he will not be without friends that admire him. Most of us are a

bit short on laughter. It is said that it takes only thirteen muscles of the face to laugh, while it takes sixty-five to frown. Too many of us insist on overworking these particular bodily organs. And the tragedy of this kind of overwork is that it does nothing but harm. "A cheerful heart doeth good like a medicine." People naturally gather round a cheerful man as candle flies gather about a candle. If you want a sure road to popularity, be an out and out optimist. It is quite certain that Samson owed much of his favor with the people to the fact that he was so sunny and full of laughter.

2. Samson was a man of fine physical courage. Now physical courage is not the highest type of courage. It is a courage that we possess in company with the bulldog. Yet we all admire it in spite of that fact. It is a quality that is admired by every age and by every type of character. The savage admires it, and so do the most highly civilized. It is admired by the young and by the old, by the ignorant and by the educated, by the Oriental and by the Occidental. It is a virtue in fact that commands universal admiration.

How the small boys of Samson's day must have honored him! How they must have regarded him with an admiration that was close akin to worship! And this was true not simply of the small boys, but of the men and women as well. Had he not met enemy after enemy with coolest courage? Was he ever known to show the slightest tremor of fear? Was there ever a hint of cowardice as he stood in the presence of his foes regardless of how greatly he was outnumbered? People simply had to admire a man of his type. They could not help it. Neither can we even at this distant day.

And not only had this popular hero shown himself unafraid in the presence of men, but there was a story current that he one day had had quite a heated argument with a lion. Samson, you remember, was going courting. He was on his way to see his best girl. Suddenly a lion roared against him. Now the lion was young and Samson was young. The lion said: "This is my road." Samson said: "No, you are mistaken, it is mine." The lion repeated his original statement with emphasis. Samson replied: "My beloved is waiting for me just beyond you. Gangway, please!" And a few days later Samson passed along that same road with his hands full of honey. And later he had quite an amusing riddle about how out of the eater came forth meat and out of the strong came forth sweetness. Samson was a man of unusual courage.

3. Samson was an athlete. Thus he was the type of hero that of all others appealed to the half-savage age in which he lived. We claim to-day, of course, that we no longer put the measuring string round a man's muscle to determine his greatness. We put it round his head and especially round his heart. But that is only partially true. The higher type of hero does not occupy a much larger place in the popular esteem than the hero of the Samson type. His big advantage is that he holds our admiration longer. We soon forget the athlete. But he grips us hard during the days of his glory.

For instance, should the greatest American poet visit any ordinary city at the same time that Jack Dempsey was making his appearance in that city, I am not sure but that the overwhelming majority of the people would go to see the pugilist instead of the poet. Or if the President of the United States were speaking in

one stadium and Babe Ruth were batting in another stadium a few blocks away, I am by no means sure that a large and enthusiastic audience would not stay away from hearing the President. When I was a student at Harvard University, the man whose public appearance created the most enthusiasm was not the president of that great institution, but the captain of the football team. If we so honor the athlete to-day, it is not at all wonderful that Samson was regarded with the highest admiration in the iron age in which he lived.

II

What was the secret of Samson's unusual strength? He did not owe it to his excellent training. It was not altogether a natural gift. His strength was a gift from God. Of course that is in the profoundest sense true of every gift that we possess. If you have ability in any direction, you have not simply yourself to thank for it. It came to you as a gift from God, and it came to you to be used not for yourself, but for Him and for your fellows. There is nothing you possess that you have not received. Hence, you are a debtor to God and to all mankind.

But God was able to give this man peculiar strength because of his vow of consecration. Before Samson was born his father and mother resolved that he should be given to the Lord. When he himself had come to years of discretion, he assumed on his own behalf the vows they assumed for him. He became a Nazarite. His consecration was by no means perfect. But it made it possible for the Spirit of God to come in power upon him as He could not have come without this vow.

This spiritual power is granted to men to-day on exactly the same conditions. "We are His witnesses to these things; and so is also the Holy Ghost, whom God hath given to them that obey Him." If we put ourselves in God's hands, He will fill us with His power and use us for His glory. That does not mean that He will give to all the same kind of power. "He divides," Paul tells us, "to every man severally as He will." To Samson He gave the type of power that was best suited to the iron age in which he lived. To you He will give the kind of power that you most need for the living of the life and the doing of the work to which He in His providence has called you.

III

Now there came a day when Samson proved untrue to his vow. How did he come to his fall?

1. In my opinion Samson had simply grown tired of being good. As Judge in Israel he had been quite decent for many years. At last the monotony of the life he was living began to tell on him. It got on to his nerves. He felt as if he must break away. He had an eagerness for laughter, a passionate hunger for pleasure. He felt, therefore, that he could endure his treadmill round of duties no longer. He must needs go on a lark.

And there is nothing peculiar about Samson's conduct in this respect. His desire to break away is a very normal desire. I think it is perfectly natural to almost all partially consecrated people. Have you never felt that you would just like to throw restraints and conventionalities aside and do something mean? Have you never had young people confess this desire to

you? I was brought up on the farm. I noticed that when a mule was kept up in a stable for a day or two, if you let him out you had to watch out for the young colts and calves. He would kill them if he could. And we humans have a trace of this in ourselves. There are times when we feel the call of the wild. There are times when we feel that it would be a positive joy to do something downright wicked.

2. Then, there was a great deal of egotism in Samson. He was quite sure of himself. That is evidenced by the fact that he went for his holiday not among his own people, but among his enemies. He went down to Gaza. He was so magnificently strong! He had come off victor in so many contests, in so many battles, that he felt there was nothing to fear. In fact he had no doubt an undefined conviction that the danger to which he was exposing himself would add an extra tang to his pleasure. He was not in the least afraid of temptation. He rather welcomed it.

Now it is always a sad day when any servant of the Lord feels it necessary to go among enemies in order to have a good time. The Lord taught us to pray this prayer: "Lead us not into temptation." But Samson cast the prayer from him. He hunted for temptation. He found it and played with it and laughed in its face and said: "I can enjoy this sin, or I can let it alone. I am my own master." But there came a time when temptation turned the tables. It played with Samson and laughed at him. Samson broke his vow. Of course the loss of his hair was nothing. The loss of that for which the unshorn hair stood was everything. It signified his consecration to God.

IV

What were the results of this broken vow?

1. It cost Samson his strength. When his temptress greets him with the familiar cry: "The Philistines be upon thee, Samson," the hero rises with his old time courage and says, "I will go out as at other times before and shake myself." Heretofore all that was necessary in order for him to overcome his foes was to bestir himself. All he had to do was to bring those mighty muscles into play. But it is different now. The Lord has departed from him. And with His going Samson's strength becomes utter weakness.

God cannot give us power if we refuse to use it for Him. The father loved the prodigal son in the far country as much as he loved him at home. But he could not bless him there. Had he done so he would have encouraged him to remain in the swine pen. Our Father woos us in the far country, but He feeds us at His own table. Sin cuts us off from His help. It robs us of His power. It is purity that is strong, and that only.

"My good blade carves the casques of men,
My quick lance thrusteth sure,
My strength is as the strength of ten,
Because my heart is pure."

2. This sin of the broken vow cost Samson his vision. The Philistines took him, the story says, and put out his eyes. When he broke with God, he broke with the light. When he went into sin he went into darkness. It is ever so. "Blessed are the pure in heart for they shall see God," and they only. There is nothing else

that so blinds us to God as sin. There is nothing else that so completely hides from us His loving face. However real God may be to you to-night, you can sin against Him till He becomes as unreal as the dimmest shadow of a dream. Sin means blindness, and that of the most awful type, moral blindness.

3. This sin cost Samson his freedom. It bound him with fetters of brass. It set him doing the work of a slave. That is not what Samson expected. He thought when he left Israel and set out to Gaza he was going to find a larger life and a fuller freedom. That is the promise that sin has made to its votaries all through the centuries. But it is a promise that it has never kept. Sin never means freedom. It means slavery.

The truth of the matter is, there is no freedom except in conformity to law. One day I see a magnificent engine on the Southern Railroad. I speak to that engine and tell it how I admire its strength, its magnificent powers, its fleetness. Then I add: "But there is one thing I cannot but condemn. That is your narrowness. You allow yourself to be confined to a little track less than five feet wide. A miserable little road cart can go where you dare not go. When you get out in the field why don't you assert yourself and claim your freedom?" And that engine listens. And the next day when it is going fifty miles an hour, it takes my advice and turns out into the green fields. What happens? The papers come out next day announcing a tragic wreck on the Southern.

Pacing back and forth on the deck of a great transatlantic steamer, I cannot fail to admire the grace and beauty and comfort and power of this magnificent floating palace. I speak to it of my high admiration. But I tell the great vessel I cannot understand for the life

of me why, with her more than forty thousand ton displacement, she allows herself to be dominated and controlled by a little compass not larger than my two fists. "Throw the little tyrant overboard," I advise, "and do as you please." And the ship hears me, and overboard goes the compass. Is the ship free? It is not. It becomes a plaything of the winds and the waves. It is no longer mistress of the seas. It is a derelict, bound for no port, destined to cast anchor in no harbor.

Now, the same rule held for Samson. He also fails to find freedom in the violation of law. He must obey the law of his own being, which is the law of God. The wise man spoke a true word when he said: "Ye shall be holden with cords of your sin." The very moment you step aside from the path of righteousness, you begin to dress your soul in chains. Every sin you commit is a new thread in the cords that bind you. Samson went into the ways of wrong doing to find a larger liberty and a larger life. But he did not succeed. He only found fetters and a prison house and a slave's task. It is ever so. For "Whosoever committeth sin is the bond slave of sin."

Samson's fatal blunder, then, was that he alllowed himself to be duped into believing that the way of consecration to God was a way of impoverishment, while the way of rebellion was a way of enrichment. Yet in spite of the tragic experience of this man of the long ago, in spite of the tragic experiences of ourselves, we still listen to the same ghastly lie. Believe me! It is not God who makes men into weak, blind slaves. It is sin. If every man who has found that true in his own experience were to say "Amen" at this moment, it would boom like a cannonade and shake like an earthquake. Christ is not come to rob. He gives light and

power. He sets at liberty those who are bound. If you want freedom in the highest sense, you will find it in obedience to Him. "If the Son shall make you free, ye shall be free indeed." All other courses end in slavery.

XIII

THE SELF-MADE FOOL—SAUL

I Samuel 26:21

"I have played the fool."

This is the confession of King Saul. He is referring especially to one act, or to one series of acts in his life. He is condemning his conduct toward a young man that he once admired and loved, named David. But this same confession might have been used as a final summing up of Saul's life. It might serve as his autobiography. And that which deepens the pathos of this confession is the fact that this rôle was self-chosen. Saul was not sent into the world to play the part of a fool. God did not plan to deck him out with cap and bells. He was intended to play the part of a king. God planned that he should wear the garments of royalty. But he thwarted God's plan. He chose the rôle of fool. But he is not the type of fool that makes us laugh. He is a fool over whom we must weep if we can find any tears bitter enough.

I

When we first meet Saul there is much in him to admire.

1. He was a man of splendid physique. The record tells us that he was a choice young man. He stood head and shoulders above any man in Israel. He was

kingly in his appearance. He was princely in his bearing. And, mark me, a sound body is a great asset in winning the game of life. Many a man has won in spite of the heavy handicap of physical weakness. But the chances are certainly in favor of the man who has a strong physical body.

There was a time when we put a far lower estimate on the value of the body than we do to-day. I think I have known folks who tended to admire a preacher all the more if he was physically weak. They seemed to think that a bad case of nerves or of indigestion added to his piety. But we are realizing more and more that the man or woman who gets the furthest, other things being equal, must have a sound body through which to work.

2. Then Saul was a modest man. This is evident from his words to Samuel. When the prophet came to anoint him king he told him frankly that he was of the tribe of Benjamin and that Benjamin was the smallest of the tribes of Israel; that his father's house was the smallest of the families of Benjamin. Then, too, he was not too big to work honestly at a lowly task. He was in search of his father's asses, you remember, when he found his kingdom. It is often the case that in the faithful doing of the commonplace duty we find ourselves called to the higher and the more conspicuous.

3. In the third place Saul had youth. He was in the springtime of life. His best years were yet before him. He was yet brushing the dewy flowers of life's morning. He was at the age when choice can be most easily made and most easily adhered to. He was at that hour in which a right choice might bring to him and to the world the largest results. He was a young man.

"How beautiful is youth, how bright it gleams,
With its allusions, aspirations, dreams,
Book of beginnings, story without end,
Each maid a heroine, each man a friend."

4. Next, Saul had a great friend. When Charles Kingsley was asked for the secret of his own beautiful life, he answered: "I had a friend." This same great blessing was granted to Saul. It was his privilege to have Samuel for his friend and for his pastor. Samuel loved him with patient devotion. When Saul went wrong Samuel did all that human power could do to win him from his wrong. And to the very end of his life this faithful prophet never ceased to pray for him. He clung to him as a father might cling to a prodigal son.

5. He was chosen for a great task. He was chosen for this task not arbitrarily, but because he had more fitness for it at the time than any other man in sight. He was not simply the choice of Samuel, the prophet, nor of the people. He was God's choice. Not that he was in any sense perfect. He was far from it. But he was, I repeat, the best that God could find in all Israel at that time. So God set His seal upon him. The word says that the Spirit of God came upon him and that God gave him another heart.

II

What use did Saul make of his opportunities? What returns did he render for the big investment that God had made in him?

Answer: He played the fool. If we should ask in what specific way he played the fool, the answer would

be readily given by all who are acquainted with his life. Saul sinned. He rebelled against God. He turned from following after the Lord who had lifted him out of his lowly place and put a crown on his head.

But, while that answer would be in a sense correct, it is not the truest answer. Saul did sin. He sinned deeply. But there have been countless others who have sinned in a far more ugly and hideous way than he whose lives yet ended in glory and in victory. Saul was never guilty of any sin half so detestable as the sin of his successor, who came to be a man after God's own heart. The tragedy of the life of Saul was not so much in the fact that he sinned as in the fact that he could never be brought to face his sin and to confess it and to hate it and to put it away.

For instance. God sent him one day with a command to destroy the Amalekites. He was to utterly destroy all their sheep and cattle, everything they had. Saul gathered his army in good faith and set out to the accomplishment of the task assigned. He defeated the Amalekites, but he took their king captive and saved the best of the sheep and the fattest of the cattle. And with these he returned home seemingly in perfect confidence that he had thoroughly fulfilled the command of his Lord.

But the Lord never counts a partial obedience as a whole-hearted obedience. Therefore, the word of the Lord came to Samuel saying: "Saul has turned from following after me." Not that Saul refused to do anything that the Lord commanded,—he only refused to do all. That is, he obeyed God in so far as it suited him, and beyond that he would not go. He killed the cattle that he did not want and kept the rest. He clung to the sins that appealed to him and threw the

rest away. And such half-hearted obedience God counts as absolute rebellion.

When Samuel heard of Saul's failure, it broke his heart. "Saul has turned from following after me." Samuel never heard worse news than that. Every word is soaked in tears. Every syllable staggers under a weight of agony. There was no sleep for the old prophet that night. The record says that he cried unto God all night. What a privilege to have a man like that for your friend! What a privilege to have somebody, a father or mother or wife or pastor, who thinks enough of you to break his heart over your wrong doing! "Samuel cried unto the Lord all night." But he was not content even with this. Not only did he speak to the Lord about Saul's sin, but he resolved to speak to the king himself. That was fine. That was courageous.

So after a sleepless night we see this brave old preacher setting out to try to bring the rebellious king to repentance. All the way to Saul's tent I can imagine this prophet is praying. At last he arrives. But when the two men stand eye to eye, only one face is drawn with pain. Only one face is stained with tears, and that is the face of the preacher. Saul is seemingly as happy and care free as a little child. He greets his friend in a tone that is so pious that it fairly oozes unction. "Blessed be thou of the Lord," he cries. "I have performed the commands of the Lord." You see he has no disposition to acknowledge his sin. Seemingly he has no consciousness of wrong doing whatsoever. He lies as glibly as if he were morally color blind.

Then suddenly an embarrassing situation develops. The lie is scarcely out of his mouth when some of those

fat sheep begin to bleat, and some of those prize cattle begin to low. Possibly Saul had the grace to blush. Possibly he was not too hardened to show a bit of confusion. But if he did he recovered himself quickly. He never lost his power of speech. He had an answer right on the tip of his tongue. "Oh, those cattle?" he said. "There are cattle there, it is true. They are not all dead, but that is no fault of mine."

When these cattle began to low Saul had a big chance. His sin became open and palpable. Had David been in his place, I feel confident that he would then and there have burst into tears and have asked the old prophet to pray for him. But not so Saul. Saul was just ready for more talk. He said, "I did not absolutely destroy all the sheep and cattle, but the reason I did not was the fault of the people. The people spared them. I am not to blame. They are to blame. A sin has been committed, but it is not mine, it is theirs."

Oh, this fatal excuse making! There is nothing that more surely shows an utter lack of repentance on the part of a man than the fact that he makes excuse for his sin. Just so long as you blame circumstances, just so long as you blame the Church, just so long as you blame anybody in the world but yourself, just that long will you remain unrepentant. Just that long, too, will you remain unforgiven. For if there is an excuse for sin, then you are not guilty. If you are not guilty, then you do not need pardon. If you are not guilty, you have no part in the redemption wrought through Christ. He is come to seek and to save that which is lost.

But the people, Saul, who was their leader? Were you not their king? Could you not control them? Had you commanded them to carry out the Lord's com-

mand, would they not have done so? Certainly they would. Saul knows, as Samuel knows, that the fault is all his own; that the guilt is all his; that he has nobody to blame but himself. But when he is driven from this hiding place, he still will not come clean and confess. He tries to put a religious face on his sin: "Yes, we spared the best of the sheep and oxen, it is true, but we did it for religious reasons. We brought them along to sacrifice to the Lord, your God."

And what answer does the prophet make? "Hath the Lord as great pleasure in sacrifice as in obeying the voice of the Lord?" You see what Saul is trying to do. He is trying to buy an indulgence. He wants to pay God for the privilege of sinning. He wants to do wrong and then get excused from it by giving to the Lord a few fat sheep and cattle. But the Lord rejected Saul's offer, as He rejects ours. There is nothing that will take the place of whole-hearted obedience. Driven thus from this last refuge, Saul makes confession. He says, "I have sinned."

Saul made that confession more often than any other man in all the Bible. It was on his lips again and again. From the number of times he uttered it, you might fancy that he was the most penitent of men. How often he is saying, "I have sinned, I have sinned!" But under what circumstances does he make these confessions? He makes them only when he is in some kind of difficulty. Whenever you hear Saul confessing after this fashion, you may know he is in some kind of trouble from which he wants immediate release. Here the prophet has told him that because of his sin God is going to take the kingdom from him. He does not want to lose the kingdom. Therefore he acknowledges his guilt. But never would he make such an acknowl-

edgment except under pressure of some impending calamity.

And, mark you, Saul is not in a class to himself. How many of us never think seriously of Christ or of His salvation until we get into some kind of trouble! Our little baby is near death and we want help. We ourselves are nearing the crossing and we are afraid. A cyclone is on hand and we feel the need of a refuge. But the same winds that carry the clouds away carry away our penitence and our prayers. There are few folks so hopeless as those who never want Christ except when they are threatened by some kind of disaster.

III

What was the outcome of Saul's foolishness?

1. He became a Godless man. Hear that pathetic cry! "God hath departed from me and heareth me no more." We pity the man who has lost his sight or the man who has lost his hearing, or the man who has lost his health. We pity the man who has lost his loved ones. We even pity the man who has lost his money, who from a man of means has become poor. But what of the man who has lost his God? Certainly he has suffered the supreme loss. The most tragic figure on this side of the river of death, or on the other side, is the man who has no God. Saul became a man without God.

2. Saul became a wretched man. From this time on the light dies out of his skies. The flowers all wither in his garden. His springs all dry up. Gloom settles down upon him as deep as that woven out of the warp and woof of loneliness and despair. There is no laughter in his soul, no peace in his heart, no hope for the dawning of to-morrow. He has lost God, and, losing God, he is wretched.

3. He becomes fretful and feverish and suspicious. He lets himself fall into the hands of that torturing fiend called envy. One day when he returned from battle he was greeted with a song: "Saul has slain his thousands and David has slain his ten thousands." That song put an adder in his bosom. That song became a fire in his soul. And henceforth he suffers the pangs of hell because he has become a prey to envy.

4. Last of all he becomes a plaything of his evil forebodings. Once he had been a brave man. But now the sight of the army of the enemy fills him with terror. Like a hunted thing he turns here and there seeking some kind of help. He must have help, but he knows not where to find it. He cannot appeal to God, for he has never repented of his sin. During the days of his rebellion he has not learned how to pray. He feels that it is too late to learn the secret now. What is he to do? Where is he to go? In sheer desperation he turns to an old witch that has hidden herself away in a cave—a cave to which he himself had banished her in his better days.

Man is incurably religious. If he has not a true religion, he will have a false. There are times when everybody must pray. There are times when the strongest of us must needs seek help. There are times when the most self-sufficient must turn somewhere or to some thing in search of assistance. Saul had flung away God. He had flung away the truth. Therefore, goaded on by the demons of wretchedness and fear, he throws himself at the feet of a woman who is a miserable impostor.

From this scene he goes unhelped and unencouraged to his last fight. The battle goes against him. His faithful soldiers, his courageous sons fall about him. At last the fatal day is closing in utter disaster. Everything is lost. Then it is that I see a great kingly figure

standing sweat-grimed and blood-stained, among the slain. He calls upon his armor bearer to thrust him through that he may not fall into the hands of his enemies. But that individual shrinks back with fear and horror. Then the poor lost king falls on his own sword. What does he mutter as he bites the dust in death? This, I imagine, "I have played the fool."

And, mark you, Saul did not go to his ruin alone. If he had played the fool on a hidden stage it would not have been so tragic. When I was a boy I used to help get timber in the forests in our great hills. Here and there we would saw trees that measured from four to five feet in diameter. Now and then a friend who was passing would stop and say: "It seems a pity to cut a great tree like that." But there was something even more tragic than the falling of this great giant of the forests. It was this: As it went crashing to its ruin it flung out its arms and carried other trees with it. Here it caught a graceful young poplar, there a tall slender hickory, and yonder a beech, over there an elm. It did not go to its death alone. Neither did Saul. Neither will you.

I cannot but think how differently his story might have ended. How Saul might have been a blessing to his children and a blessing to his nation; how after-generations might have been enriched by his life if he had only proven true to God. And what was his tragedy? Not so much the fact that he sinned, but the fact that he could never be brought to face and confess his sin and put it away. He refused to repent. Thus refusing, he flung away his here and he flung away his hereafter. Therefore, we can think of no better epitaph to be carved upon his tomb than this: "He played the fool."

XIV

THE WINGS OF A DOVE—DAVID

Psalm 55:6

"Oh that I had wings like a dove! for then would I fly away and be at rest."

Here is a man who wants to run, or, to speak more accurately, he wants to fly. Maybe he feels himself too tired or too old or too utterly discouraged to run. So he yearns for the wings of a dove that he may be quickly up and away. Who is this man? Frankly, I do not know. I take it that his name is David. This I say, confessing at the same time that I can no more prove that David uttered these words than you can prove that he did not. Everything considered, however, this bit of poetry seems to me to fit his sensitive and songful lips better than those of any other man that I know.

One can easily imagine the scene. David is pacing back and forth on his palace roof on the highest hill in Jerusalem. From below comes the noise of turmoil and confusion. Rebellion is abroad. And to add to the king's heartache, this rebellion is being led by his own son, Absalom. Hence his beloved city has suddenly become a restless and wretched place. But as he looks away from the near, the distant scenes seem wonderfully quiet and full of peace. Far away the hills still lift their heads in restful grandeur. Suddenly a dove alights upon the roof and begins to coo to the sunset and

to the peaceful hills. With a fellow feeling for the bird, he approaches her. But she is a bit shy and whirrs away into the far vault of blue. Then he shades his eyes and looks after her until she becomes first a speck and then fades into utter nothingness. Then he wipes his eyes that have grown moist, partly from looking upon the brightness without, but more from looking upon the darkness within, and he says something through lips white with pain. What is he saying? Just this: "Oh that I had wings like a dove! for then would I fly away and be at rest."

I

A very human cry is this of the Psalmist. It is one that has sobbed its way through the centuries. All of us have uttered it in one form or another. It is a cry of the far distant past. But it belongs no less to the intimate present. This is what Jeremiah was saying when he cried: "Oh that I had in the wilderness a lodging place for wayfaring men, that I might leave my people and go from them." And Cowper was only paraphrasing Jeremiah when he cried: "Oh for a lodge in some vast wilderness . . . where rumor of disaster and deceit might never reach me more." Tennyson puts this same longing in the mouth of his disappointed lover in Locksley Hall:

"Oh, for some retreat
Deep in yonder shining Orient where my life began to beat,
There methinks would be enjoyment more than in this march of mind,
In the steamship, in the railway, in the thoughts that shake mankind."

And our own American poet expresses the same yearning in "The Bridge."

"How often, oh, how often
In the days that had gone by
I had stood on the bridge at midnight
And gazed on the wave and sky.

How often, oh, how often
I had wished that the ebbing tide
Would bear me away on its bosom
O'er the ocean, wild and wide.

For my heart was hot and restless
And my life was full of care,
And the burden laid upon me
Seemed greater than I could bear."

This longing for dove's wings is a part of my own experience. I shall never forget the first charge that I was sent to serve as a boy preacher. It was in a little new community in the West. There were problems connected with this charge that would have been very perplexing even for one of mature years and experience. The man whose place I took had gone miserably wrong. Two local preachers who were members of my church had also gone wrong. Quite naturally I found myself at the very beginning unwanted and in disrepute.

But at first I was not greatly dismayed. I looked with eager expectation to the coming of the Sabbath. I flattered myself that I had three good sermons, and I had made up my mind to preach the best of the three at my first opportunity. With the fine optimism of youth, I had great hopes that this sermon would put all the prejudice of my people to rout and give me a grip

on their hearts. So on the following Sunday I went hopefully to church. There were very few present. My sermon did not seem to make any impression at all. One of my renegade brethren in the ministry invited me home to dinner with him, and I went because there was nowhere else to go. No sooner had I entered his home than he disappeared. I was shown a place at the table and dishes were set about me in hotel fashion, and I ate alone. You may believe that that dinner was a very brief affair.

When I arose from the table I looked about once more for my host. Not finding him, I seized my hat and hurried out of the house and out of the little village into the woods. Through this woods I went as one pursued. At last I came out upon a railroad track that ran east and west. I turned my steps toward the west. Here again and again I found myself unconsciously breaking into a run. Then I would stop and tell myself that I had made a tragic mistake. For by this time I had fully decided that I had never been called to preach, and that, let come what might, I never would preach. At last I paused to watch the sun as it slipped in behind a great summer cloud. And as I watched the sun thus hiding itself, I said: "I wish I could turn that big cloud on its hinges and slip in behind it and get away from all this." And I was saying just what David was saying, "Oh that I had wings like a dove! Then would I fly away and be at rest."

II

Now what was the matter with David? It was not that he was a mere weakling. It was not that he was a coward. It was not that he was a pigmy of a man.

On the contrary he was a big man, a many-sided man. He was a great warrior. He had conducted many a victorious campaign. He was a great statesman. He had shown himself a king of real ability. He was a great poet. He had sung songs that will live as long as literature lives. At his best, he was a great saint. Then he had a marvelous capacity for winning the hearts of people. Jonathan wanted nothing bigger than to be second to David. Then one day he is hiding among the fastnesses of the hills. The enemy is about him. He is thirsty and he thinks wistfully of the well by the gate of Bethlehem. And he cries, more to himself, I imagine, than to others: "Oh that I had a drink from the old well." Three of his rough followers hear him. They slip out of their hiding places to return later, each with a drink of water from the longed-for well. And that water is so tinged with the sweat and blood of sacrifice that David is too big a man to drink it, but pours it out on the ground as a libation to their love and loyalty. Yet this great and greatly loved man longs for the wings of a dove that he may fly away and be at rest.

What, then, is the matter?

1. David was face to face with a task to which he felt himself unequal. Rebellion was abroad. His nation was being torn into fragments. The ship of state needed a strong man at the helm. But David felt unable to cope with the situation. There had been a time when his hand would have gripped the sword and he would have gone to the conflict in perfect confidence. But such was not the case to-day. He was no longer young. The weight of years was upon him. The fires of his early enthusiasms had burned low. He was no longer possessed of the fine madness of youth. There-

fore, in the face of the present crisis, he felt himself old and unfit. Hence he wanted to fling down his weighty and unwelcome responsibility and fly away. Being so tired of wearing armor, he wanted to exchange it for the wings of a dove.

2. Then David wanted to fly from the torture of a broken heart. The leader of this rebellion, remember, was Absalom, his loved and handsome boy. He it was who was now teaching his doting father "how sharper than a serpent's tooth it is to have a thankless child." And David's pain was one for which he saw no slightest promise of cure save in flight. Should he go out to battle against this unnatural son of his and be defeated, it might mean death for himself, and, therefore, so much added guilt for Absalom. Should he go and win, his victory would be more bitter even than defeat. Therefore, it was only natural that this father, so piteously wronged and wounded, longed for the wings of a dove that he might fly away and be at rest.

3. Then David wanted to get away from a tormenting memory. He found it impossible in these terrible days to keep that darkest sin of his life out of his mind. He tried to fix his attention on the fact that God had forgiven him. But even as he did so that slimy and bloody deed seemed to reach a hand out of "the black coat sleeve of the past" to grip him with cruel fingers. A mocking voice seemed to say to him: "After all, you are to blame. The Prophet warned you then that the sword would not depart from your house. It has not departed. It is here to-day, and you have none to thank for it but yourself." And David wanted to fly from this tormenting memory.

4. Last of all David wanted to get away from an atmosphere that was poisoned by ingratitude and chilled

by lack of appreciation. His best friend had become unfaithful to him. "For it was not an enemy that reproached me, then I could have borne it. Neither was it he that hated me that did magnify himself against me, then I would have hid myself from him. But it was thou, a man mine equal, my guide and mine acquaintance. We took sweet counsel together, and walked unto the house of God in company. The words of his mouth were smoother than butter, but war was in his heart. His words were softer than oil, yet were they drawn swords." And so cruelly did David feel this wound that he seemed to himself utterly abandoned and forsaken. He felt that there was not a man in all the world to whom it mattered whether he rose or fell, lived or died.

III

And it is interesting to notice where this distressed and burdened man wants to go. "David, suppose you had wings like a dove, where would you go?" "Lo, then, would I wander far off and remain in the wilderness." And why the wilderness? That was his old home. That was where he used to live in the glad days of childhood. That was where he watched the sheep before he climbed so far up the hill that the atmosphere was full of chill. That was where he spent those carefree days before he wore a crown that now gave him the headache and the heartache. He wants to get back to his boyhood home.

"Backward, flow backward, O tide of years;
I am so weary of toils and of tears,
Toils without recompense, tears all in vain,
Take them and give me my childhood again.

Come let your brown hair just lightened with gold
Fall on your shoulders again as of old.
Let it fall over my forehead to-night,
Shielding my faint eyes away from the light.

And with its sunny-edged shadows once more
Haply will throng the sweet visions of yore.
Slumber's soft calm o'er my heavy lids creep.
Rock me to sleep, Mother, rock me to sleep.

IV

But David discovered before he had finished his song that this very natural longing for the wings of a dove was after all only a vain longing. He came to understand, as all of us understand sooner or later, I think, that the attainment of rest does not depend upon flight, but upon something else altogether. If rapidity of flight brought rest, then ours would be the most restful generation that the world has ever known. But we do not find rest by passing from one side of the street to the other or from one side of the world to the other. Heartache is quite as swift-winged as we can hope to be. Milton's devil made that discovery. "Infinite woe and infinite despair, which way I fly is hell, myself and hell. . . . The mind is its own peace and in itself can make a heaven of hell, a hell of heaven."

Not only did the Psalmist discover that flight was no remedy for his ills, but he found also that his one remedy was in God. "Cast thy burden upon the Lord and he shall sustain thee. He shall never suffer the righteous to be moved." He came to understand that what he needed was not a new physical atmosphere, but a new spiritual atmosphere. He discovered that his

great need was not the support of the wings of a dove, but the undergirding of the Everlasting Arms.

Now this lesson that the Psalmist learned long ago is needed by ourselves. We are still tempted to believe that we can cure our ills by running away. But it is a vain belief. Our hope is not in flight, but in God. "And now, Lord, what wait I for, my hope is in Thee." Are you weary and burdened of heart? Are you heavy laden and in sore need of rest? Then here is your remedy: "Come unto me all ye that are weary and heavy laden and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you and learn of me; for I am meek and lowly in heart; and ye shall find rest unto your souls."

XV

THE LAUGHING FOOL—THE MOCKER

Proverbs 14: 9

"Fools make a mock of sin."

I

What is it to make a mock of sin? It is to treat sin lightly, to regard it as a matter of no consequence. Ha! ha! Do you hear that laughter? Do you hear that merry jest? Do you hear that easy jibe of contempt? Do you see that man popping his fingers in mirthful scorn? What is the joke? At what is he laughing? Answer: Sin. He is making a mock of sin. And who is that man? Need you ask? That man is a fool. A cultured fool, perhaps. A rich fool clothed in purple and fine linen and faring sumptuously every day, possibly. A fool of the gutter, clad in rags and wallowing in dirt and feeding on filth, may chance. But at any rate a fool. For fools, and only fools, make a mock of sin.

II

There are many such mockers.

1. This is evidenced by many of the conversations in which we engage or which we may chance to overhear. Here, for instance, is a story of a bit of sordid conduct on the part of a young friend of ours. What

is our reaction when we hear it? Possibly we are grieved. It may be we hear it with shame and heartache and humiliation. But probably we treat the matter very lightly. We say, "Oh, well, young men will be young men." As if young manhood is never really crowned until it is crowned with dirt. Or "It will all come out in the wash." As if there were any ocean large enough to wash away a moral stain. Or "It will not matter a hundred years from now." As if soot would be changed into snow by the mere passing of the years.

We have a large fund of such phrases, and their number and the frequency of their use proclaim the fact that we treat sin lightly. By such expressions we endeavor to hide sin's hideousness from ourselves. It is thus we try to conceal this vomiting volcano with words. It is thus we endeavor to drown the stench of this moral carrion under a floodtide of verbal perfume. Oh, we have only to listen to the easy excuses for misconduct and the cheap jests about wrong doing to realize that one of the predominant dangers of the day is the habit of making a mock of sin.

2. We recognize this tendency when we face the lawlessness of our day. (1) There is the lawlessness of the modern home. The disobedience of children to parents is one of the commonest tragedies of the day. But it is a tragedy that is treated as a very trivial matter. Rebellion against all home authority, it would appear, is a thing of no consequence at all. The other day I saw an enraged child actually slap her mother in the face, and the mother treated the matter as a joke. How foolish! She forgot that she was sowing the seeds of future rebellion in the heart of her child. She forgot that stern sentence of the Old Book—"The eye that

mocketh at his father and despiseth to obey his mother, behold the ravens of the valley shall pluck it out and the young eagles shall eat it."

(2) In like manner we regard the lawlessness of our Nation. This lawlessness of our homes has given birth to national lawlessness. Thus it has come to pass that the American people are the most lawless civilized people on the face of the earth. There seems absolutely no law that we take with real seriousness. There is hardly any form of crime in which we are not the leaders. Our record for homicide is such as to startle any thoughtful man. It is appalling, disgraceful and horrible. It is costing us thousands of lives every year. But it is not the only law we break. We make havoc in a measure of all laws, knowing that the penalty is sure of enforcement only against the helpless and the poor.

Take, for example, our shameful violation of the Eighteenth Amendment. We got rid of the legalized liquor traffic at a terrible price. It cost us almost a century of conflict. It cost us rivers of blood and oceans of tears and millions of broken hearts. But at last we kicked this murderous monster out of the front door. But now, through our contempt for law, we are allowing it to wriggle in at the back door. And who is to blame? Not the negro bootlegger in "Black bottom." Not the ignorant foreigner who has learned hatred for all government through centuries of tyranny. Those most to blame are the so-called good citizens who patronize the bootlegger. Many of these are men in whose veins flow the blood of ancestors who fought in the Revolution. Such men are without excuse. And next to these in point of guilt are ourselves. We are to blame because we do not rise with the scourge of a hot and

holy indignation and drive such lawlessness from the land.

3. Then we see this tendency to treat sin lightly in the amusements of the day. How else can we account for the presence on so many screens of the sensual and obscene picture? I am not against all moving pictures. The moving picture theater, I am persuaded, is here to stay. It might be made the means of great good. But many of the pictures that we are allowing to be shown outrage all decency and make a joke of things that are fundamental to the soundness of human society. To call over the list of many popular pictures to-day is to proclaim with trumpet tongue the fact that the modern movie theater is making a mock of sin, and that we, the people, love to have it so.

4. The same tendency is seen in the modern dance. Everybody acquainted with the modern dance knows that its tendency is toward the immoral and indecent. This is true because privileges are readily taken and granted on the ball room floor that are not taken and granted anywhere else in decent society. When I was a boy I used to study by an old kerosene lamp. Not every candle fly that buzzed about that lamp got its wings burned. Not every fly that fluttered in from the dark lost its life in that fiery furnace. But every one that buzzed about the lamp flirted with danger, and many fell with scorched wings and writhing body into the arms of death. Not every one who dances becomes immoral or indecent. There are some who escape. But the tendency is downward and downward only.

5. We see this same tendency toward treating sin as a light matter in the conduct of many of us who are members of the Church. We proclaim it by our indifference. We proclaim it by our lack of earnestness. Out on Six-

teenth Street the other day the dirt caved in upon a colored man who was digging in a sewer. He was buried all but his head. I chanced to pass that way a very few minutes after the accident. I found there Red Cross nurses. I found representatives of the police department and the fire department. I found one or two ambulances. I found scores of people. In fact the whole city seemed to have bestirred itself in less than fifteen minutes for the rescue of one poor colored laborer. As I turned from the scene I could not but thank God for our growing sensitiveness to physical danger. Also I could not fail to see by contrast our appalling indifference to spiritual danger. Our lack of zeal in reaching those who are lost proclaims that even we who are professing Christians tend to make a mock of sin.

III

But the text says that the man who makes a mock of sin is a fool. Why does it make use of this harsh and ugly word? Answer: Because it is true.

1. The man who makes a mock of sin is a fool because of what sin is. What is sin? Fundamentally, sin is not a matter of outward act. It is an inward something. It is a perversion of the will. It is a disease of the heart. It is a rottenness of the inner life. It is crookedness of character. Now it is only natural that this crookedness of character should express itself in crookedness of conduct. It is inevitable that from this poison fountain should flow streams of polluted action. In the very nature of things this inner lawlessness expresses itself in lawless conduct.

This lawless conduct looks in two directions:

(1) There is wrong doing. "Sin," John tells us, "is

the transgression of the law." That is, sin in the heart expresses itself outwardly in the form of transgression. It leads to the doing of that which God has forbidden. It walks brazenly over the "Thou shalt not" of the Lord God Almighty. It does the thing that God says we ought not to do. And to do that forbidden thing is to sin. It is to sin against God. It is also to sin against yourself. For every law of God is made for your benefit. Every commandment of His is for your protection and for your highest interest. God has made no law in His own interest. Every one is for the interest of you and me.

(2) Then this lawlessness expresses itself not only in wrong doing, but in failure to do right. And all such failure is sin. "To him that knoweth to do good and doeth it not, to him it is sin." Sin, therefore, is the refusal to do what you know you ought to do. Sin is seeing the road in which you ought to walk and refusing to walk there. It is seeing the load that you ought to carry and refusing to carry it. It is seeing the fight in which you ought to engage and refusing to engage in it. It is seeing the need that you ought to meet and refusing to meet it. It is seeing the character that you ought to attain and refusing to set yourself to attain it. Now to treat lightly this lawlessness of heart that issues in lawlessness of conduct is not the part of a wise man. It is the part of a fool.

2. A man is a fool who makes a mock of sin because of what sin does. Sin is no trifling matter. It is a dangerous and deadly thing. To speak the plain truth, it is the one deadly and dangerous thing in God's universe. If you do not believe that, ask History. Ask the nations of the past that sin has dogged to their graves. Ask Babylon. And the swoop of the bat and the hoot

of the owl and the howl of the jackals, that home where the swinging garden once bloomed, will all tell you that sin is deadly. Ask Rome, whose eagles once spread their wings over the world, and she will tell you through her lost crown, through her Ciceros that are organ grinders, through her Cæsars that are fruit vendors, that sin is the most deadly and dangerous thing in the world.

If you do not believe the verdict of History, ask the individual. Ask David, as he breaks his heart over the one great sin of his life. Ask him as he sees that sin slip out beyond his control and make his son, Ammon, into a rapist, to make his loved daughter into a soiled and tarnished thing. Ask him, as he sees that sin make his idolized Absalom into a murderer and then into a shapeless bit of pulp at the bottom of a pit. Ask that neighbor of yours whose sin is finding him out in the debauchery of his own son. Ask your own soul as you find yourself bound Prometheus-like upon the snowy Caucasus of an evil past, while ever and anon the vulture of some youthful sin comes to tear at your bleeding heart.

If you do not believe sin is deadly and dangerous, ask God. Consult this Old Book. On its very first page stand burning words of awful warning against sin. Its every chapter is a record of God's battle with sin and His efforts to save men from its craft and its cruelty. We hear this fact in the thunders of Sinai. We hear it in the sobs of Gethsemane. We hear it in the agony of the Cross. If sin is not the most terrible and damnable something in the universe, then the Bible is the greatest jumble of nonsense that was ever gotten together. History, the individual, God Himself declare with one voice that sin is deadly and dangerous.

This is true because sin is the great divider. (1) It separates man from God. That is the history of sin upon the first page of human history. That is the history of sin in your life and mine. If you want the face of God to become as dim to you as the shadow of a dream, if you want Jesus Christ to be as unreal as any character in mythology, try sin. Sin is the supreme genius at blotting God out of our vision and out of our experience. Sin is the secret of the broken communion and of the unanswered prayers of some listening to me now. "His arm is not shortened that He cannot save, nor is His ear heavy that he cannot hear," but our sins have separated us from the light of His countenance and the joy of His presence.

(2) Not only does sin drive a dividing wedge between God and man, it also divides man from man. The one dividing force in this world is sin. Sin lies back of all our hatreds whether they be individual or national. Sin lies back of all our conflicts whether they be those between man and man or those between continent and continent. Back of every war that has crimsoned our rivers and billowed our world with graves has been this one cruel and ghastly cause—sin. The very day that sin is killed, that day the world will become a brotherhood.

(3) Not only does sin separate man from God and man from man, but it divides man from his better self. The most ghastly and horrible of all wars is civil war. Sin puts civil war within the soul. That is the climax of tragedy. The bitterest cry that was ever wrung from the lips of St. Paul was not when he was bound to the whipping post. It was not when he was stoned and left to die. It was when he was being tortured by a divided personality. It was when he was struggling to achieve

the good that he could not achieve. It was when he was hating the thing that was gripping him and conquering him. It was then that he uttered that wail that sounds across the spaces of the years: "Oh, wretched man that I am, who shall deliver me!"

(3) Then the man who treats sin lightly is a fool, last of all, because in treating sin lightly he is likely to treat lightly God's remedy for sin. If he counts the malady from which he is suffering as a trivial matter, then he is likely also to regard the need of a physician as a trifling need. When the plague of serpents came upon the ancient Israelites God provided a remedy. But who, with the venom of death in their veins, availed themselves of that remedy? Only those who took their danger seriously. The others said, "Oh, it is a small matter, a mere scratch," and, so saying, toppled into their coffins.

Man, the danger from which you suffer is a real danger. The disease that is gnawing at your vitals is a deadly disease. And there is only one Physician that can cure it. Therefore, you cannot afford to treat Him lightly. For if you pass Him by you have passed by your only hope. "There is none other name under heaven given among men whereby we must be saved." He is here just for the benefit of the sick. If you fancy yourself whole, His coming means nothing to you. "They that are whole need not a physician, but they that are sick."

Brethren, I count myself among the sick. I know the tortures of this awful disease; for I have sinned. I know, too, that within my own strength I cannot cure this dreadful malady. I have tried, but I have met nothing but failure. And that is your experience. May God therefore grant us the wisdom to take seri-

ously this damnable disease. May we take it so seriously that we will come to Him who is able to save unto the uttermost. For "He was wounded for our transgressions. He was bruised for our iniquities. The chastisement of our peace was upon Him and with His stripes we are healed."

"Just as I am without one plea
But that Thy blood was shed for me,
And that Thou bidst me come to Thee,
O Lamb of God, I come, I come."

XVI

THE DRY BROOK—ELIJAH

I Kings 17:7

"And it came to pass after awhile that the brook dried up."

1

These were dark days in the land of Israel. Famine was abroad, and ghastly death was looking many eye to eye. The cause of this calamity, the author gives us to understand, was the sin of the people. It was sin that had cut off their water supply. It was sin that had withered their gardens. It was sin that had parched their fields. It was sin that had blighted their fruit trees. It was sin that had changed the land into a desert. Sin is ever the mother of desolation and of death.

Elijah had been sent of God to warn Ahab of this impending disaster. Having warned him, he went at the command of God into the wilderness. He made his abode by the brook Cherith. There God told him he would supply him with food to eat and with water to drink. It was a situation, I think, that was altogether congenial to the prophet. He was a man of the open spaces. He was a citizen of the out of doors. Therefore, he found life quite pleasant in these solitudes by the brookside.

A very companionable something was this brook. It sang of life and prattled of springs far up among the

hills. Better still, it whispered of the care of God and of the provision made by a Father's love. When he drank from this brook, therefore, he drank something more than water. He drank in faith. He drank in the firm conviction that God was interested in him, was watching over him, was standing ready to supply all his needs.

But one morning as he visited the brookside he was struck by the fact that the little stream was less songful than it had been. Its prattle was more hushed and subdued. There came to him the startling realization that the waters of the brook were failing. It was a bewildering experience, but he could not shut his eyes to the fact that the brook was slowly drying up. Then there came a day when he made his way to its banks to find it altogether dry. There was no song at all, but only sand,—dry, parched, glittering sand, over which the heat specters danced. But there was no drop of water.

II

There is a sense in which this experience of the prophet is not at all unique. There are few of us indeed that have not known at some time the tragedy of the dry brook. We cannot but read in this story of the prophet a bit of our own biography. What a beautiful brook yours was, clear, sweet and flower bordered! The great trees bent above it and mirrored their loveliness in its depths. Grass beautifully green grew upon its banks. It was as songful as a mocking bird, as talkative as a happy child. But it came to pass that the brook dried up. And you cannot think of it to-day without a stab of pain and a gush of tears.

What was your brook? Maybe it was a brook of worldly prosperity that vanished, leaving you with only scorching sands of poverty. Or it may have been the gushing stream of buoyant health that withered up under the blistering sun of disease till to-day every breath is an agony and every hour is torture. Or it may have been a brook of youthful ambitions and dreams. But your ambitions have been unrealized and your dreams have died under the burning breath of failure. Or perchance it was a brook of tender human love. But the loved one slipped away, and to-day there is a void that nothing in this world can fill. And you feel that the future must be little more than an unutterable longing for "the touch of a vanished hand and the sound of a voice that is still."

III

Why did the brook dry up? I wonder if there is any satisfying answer to this question. I wonder if the prophet found an answer that brought him consolation and healing of heart. I wonder if we who have passed through like experiences can find an answer that will bring a bit of help and healing to our hearts. Why did the brook dry up?

To begin with, let us be sure of this: the brook did not dry because God had forgotten His prophet. It did not dry up because God was so busy governing the universe and creating worlds that He allowed all thought of Elijah to be crowded out of His mind. You and I forget sometimes, but God never does. He is great enough to light suns and fashion stars, but He is also great enough to stoop to the humble task of clothing the lily. He is not too busy to sit by the sick bed of a spar-

row and to be present at its funeral when it dies. And be assured of this; that whatever of seeming harm has come to you, or to this prophet, it did not come because of the forgetfulness of God.

Neither did this disaster take place because God had ceased to love His prophet. He loves us with an everlasting love. We may reject Him, we may wound Him, we may rebel against Him, we may rob Him of the privilege of blessing us, but we are absolutely powerless to kill His love. Cling to this fact more tenaciously than you cling to life itself, that God loves you. He loves you when your world is bright with sunny day. He loves you no less when it is black with starless night. He loves you when springtime is about you, gay with song and color. He loves you not one whit less when winter has come and your songs are silent as the lips of death. Elijah's brook did not dry because God had ceased to love him.

Neither did this brook run dry because Elijah had sinned. It did not run dry because Elijah had taken himself outside the circle of the divine will. I am not saying that brooks are never made dry for this reason. Sin is ever fruitful of moral famine and desolation. It is ever the mother of pain and anguish. There are many to-day whose lips are blistered by the burning sands of a dry brook, and their sorrow is made all the deeper by the conviction that the brook was dried up by the scorching breath of their own iniquity.

But, while we always suffer as the result of our sin, there is a pain that is not born of the sin of the one who suffers it. There are some who suffer because they are so wicked. But there are others who suffer because they are good. It took a long time for us to find this out. The wisest at one time thought that whenever any

individual suffered, that in itself was proof positive that that individual had sinned. That is the reason that Job's three companions were so sure that their sorely smitten friend had gone wrong somewhere. But Job stood strong in his integrity and God vindicated his claim.

Why, then, did the brook dry up? It dried for the same reason that all other brooks in that drought-stricken area dried. There had been no rain. Back of this calamity, the prophet was convinced, lay the sin of Israel. Elijah, therefore, was suffering from a guilt not his own. He was sharing the pain and the tragedy of the sinning nation of which he was a part. Our lives are interwoven one with the other. We have the privilege of rejoicing with those that do rejoice, but the price we pay for this privilege is that we are compelled to weep with those that weep. Elijah's calamity, then, came to him at the hands of his sinning people.

IV

There are some profoundly important lessons, then, that we may learn from this tragedy of the dry brook.

1. God is not to be charged with this calamity. Even assuming that the drought was sent of God, it was the sin of the people that made it necessary for Him to send it. Whatever wrong, therefore, had come to Elijah through this experience, he could not justly charge that wrong to God. And what is true of the prophet is true of ourselves. Hold fast to this fact; that whatever evil has come to you, God is not the originator of it. "Shall not the Judge of all the earth do right." He shall. He does. To this solid conviction we may safely cling: God, our Father, has never inflicted one single wrong

upon any human soul since the morning stars sang together.

We need to hold firmly to this fact because there is a constant tendency to charge God with calamities for which He is in no sense responsible. "Why does not God stop the war?" is a question that was asked again and again in those awful days of blood and tears. He did not stop the war for the same reason that He did not prevent it. And He did not prevent it for the simple reason that He could not. God made man free. He has given him the privilege of choosing the right. He has given him the power to take the path that leads ever upward and where the light lingers forevermore. But with this there must also go the privilege of wrong choice. If man is gifted with the possibility of climbing, he must also have the possibility of descending into the depths. Therefore, there are tragic calamities occurring every day that God simply cannot prevent and allow man to continue to be man.

Last week I was turning away from a new made grave. As I walked through the silent city of the dead, there was a certain tombstone that drew my attention. Or to speak more correctly, it was a certain word on that tombstone. That word fairly shrieked of tragedy and of bitterness, and, I half guessed, of frenzied rebellion. The word was "MURDERED." And I stopped to read. There was the name of a girl, then "Born 1901. Murdered 1917." And I wondered if these broken-hearted parents blamed God for that foul deed. I wonder if when the nurse went to sleep and your child died, you charged God with the calamity. I wonder if when that man lied to you, cheated you, robbed you, you blamed God and got angry with Him about it.

There is a story that years ago there was a charming

girl in the fresh bloom of womanhood. A man who was an office bearer in the Church met her and made love to her. He wooed her and won her and wrecked her. From that day she became a hater of her kind. Saddest of all, she shook her soiled fist in the face of the Almighty and blamed Him. She was blind enough to hate Him for a wrong that He hated with an intensity infinitely beyond her own. Oh, heart, maybe you have suffered, maybe you have been greatly wronged. If so, in the name of justice, in the name of reason, in the name of fair play, do not blame God. He is the eternal foe of every form of evil. To blame Him, therefore, is to be guilty of deepest injustice. To blame Him also is to greatly wrong your own soul.

2. The second fact that we learn from the story is that while God is not the author of evil, He is not helpless in the face of that evil. When the brook dried, Elijah did not have to die of thirst. Our God is infinitely resourceful. He had other plans for him. Over yonder at Zarephath was a widow at whose skirts a hungry child was plucking. She was a woman who was not only sorely in need of material bread, but more sorely in need of the Bread of Life. God sent His prophet to find sustenance there. She became a blessing to him and he became a far greater blessing to her. There was a witness needed on Mount Carmel. God was eager to show His wayward children that He could still answer by fire, and Elijah must go from the brookside to accomplish this high task. Then Christ needed some suffering and understanding soul to talk with Him about the Cross centuries later on the Mount of Transfiguration. And Elijah needed the ministry of the dry brook, its anguish and pain and perplexity, to fit him for this

high task that he was to share with Moses on the Mount! God did not dry Elijah's brook, but He overruled the calamity that had come through the sin of others to the enrichment of the life of the prophet and to the enrichment of the world.

Thus our mighty God has been working through all the centuries. That was a great wrong that the Jews did to Paul when they arrested him and had him put in prison. After remaining for two years in prison at Cæsarea, he was carried to Rome. God was not responsible for Paul's hardships. He was not responsible for his persecution. He was not to blame for his imprisonment in Rome. But if He was not to blame, neither was He defeated by the wicked designs of Paul's enemies. He turned the evil intended by foes into good. Thus Paul was able to write to friends one day: "The things that have happened unto me have fallen out rather to the furtherance of the Gospel."

That was a terrible calamity that came to the tinker preacher years ago in England. Bunyan was so eager to preach the saving Word to the people about him. But he was shut in jail. God did not put him there. But He changed his imprisonment into freedom. And He changed his limitations into illimitable opportunities for service. Shut in from speaking to his own day, he spoke to all days. He became an abiding minister, guiding souls from the City of Destruction to Mount Zion. He leads generation after generation to see the far views from the Delectable Mountains. He enables them from century to century to rejoice amidst the unfading beauties of the Land of Beulah.

3. This story tells us the conditions upon which God is able to change our evil into good and our losses into

gain. It was not a matter of necessity that the tragedy of the dry book became a blessing to Elijah. It might have been the ruin of him. It might have robbed him of his faith. It might have killed his usefulness. It might have caused him to die a rebellious madman upon its parched shores. Such things have happened again and again. I heard a man cry once this exceeding bitter cry: "I could curse God, if I knew there was a God, for letting Mary die."

How then did the prophet change his calamity into capital? Simply by remaining within the circle of the will of God. All things do not work together for good for everybody. There are times when all things seem to work together for our undoing and our utter destruction. But there is one for whom all things work together for good now and ever more, and that is the man that loves God. The man who loves God is defeated by no disaster. He is conquered by no calamity. There is absolutely nothing that can come to him that God cannot cause to work for his good. For such a man He can change every defeat into victory and every loss into gain. Therefore, if you are within the circle of His will, there is absolutely no harm that can come to you in time or eternity. Oh, what a wonderful God is ours!

"I know not what the future hath
Of marvel or surprise.
I only know that life and death
His mercy underlies.

And if my heart and flesh be weak
To bear the untried pain,
A bruised reed He will not break,
But strengthen and sustain.

And so beside the silent sea
I await the muffled oar,
Assured no harm can come to me
On ocean or on shore.

I know not where His islands lift
Their fronded palms in air,
I only know I cannot drift
Beyond His love and care."

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